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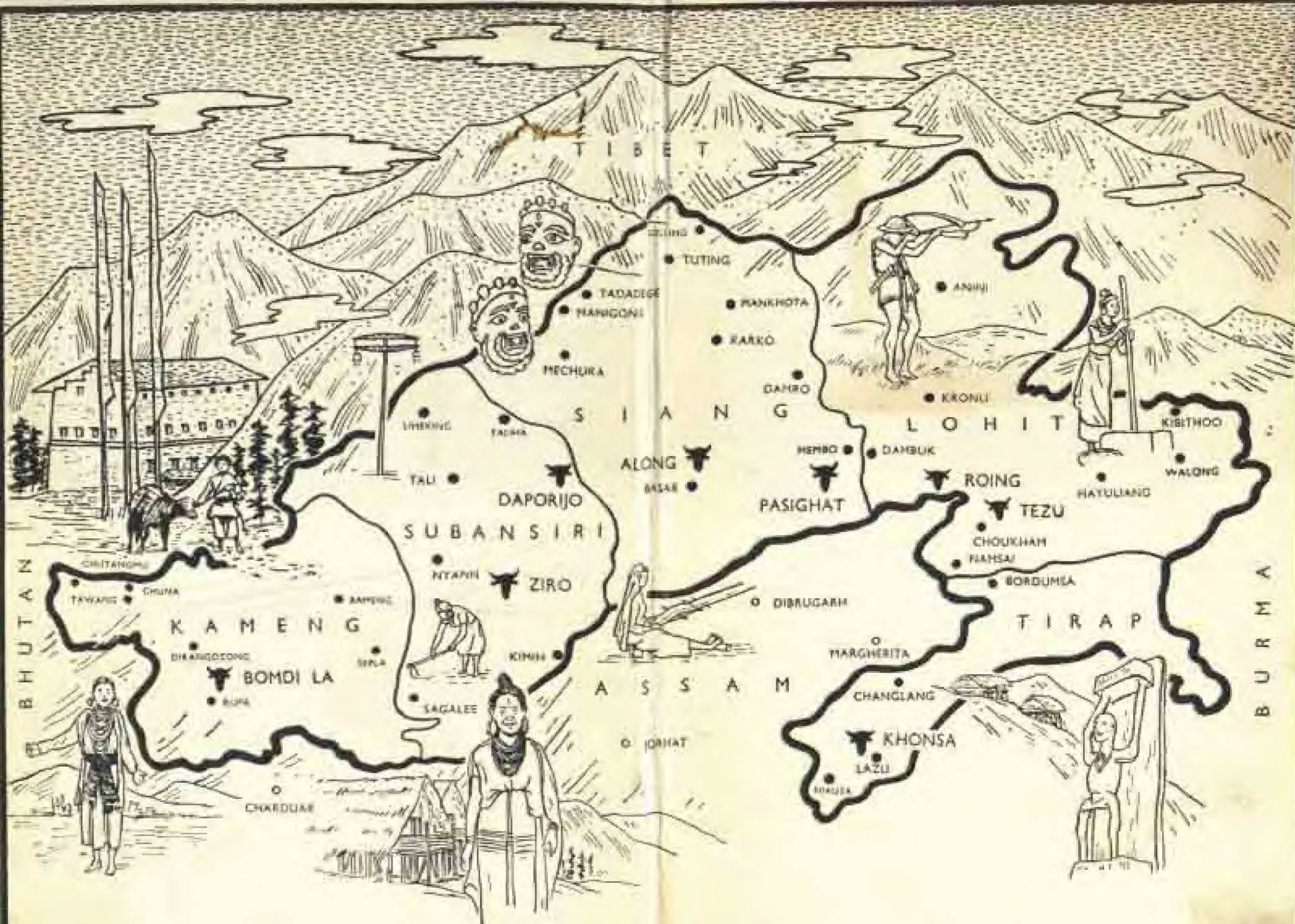
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A PHILOSOPHY FOR NEFA





THE NORTH-EAST FRONTIER AGENCY





A  
PHILOSOPHY FOR NEFA

VERRIER ELWIN

17611 With a Foreword  
by  
THE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA



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SHILLONG

1959

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*Rupers Elze*

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*I am alarmed when I see—not only in this country but in other great countries too—how anxious people are to shape others according to their own image or likeness, and to impose on them their particular way of living. We are welcome to our way of living, but why impose it on others? This applies equally to national and international fields. In fact, there would be more peace in the world if people were to desist from imposing their way of living on other people and countries.*

*I am not at all sure which is the better way of living, the tribal or our own. In some respects I am quite certain their's is better. Therefore, it is greatly presumptuous on our part to approach them with an air of superiority, to tell them how to behave or what to do and what not to do. There is no point in trying to make of them a second-rate copy of ourselves.*

—JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

*On the top of all this variety of nature and man in Africa there impinge western civilization and western industrialism. Will their impact level down the variety, reducing the proud diversity of tribes and races to a muddy mixture, their various cultures to a single inferior copy of our own? Or shall we be able to preserve the honour of difference, to fuse our culture and their's into an autochthonous civilization, to use local difference as the basis for a natural diversity of development?*

—JULIAN HUXLEY

*An open and flexible mind, which recognizes the need of transformation and faithfully sets itself to apprehend new conditions, is a prerequisite of man's usefulness. But those who take my point of view will try to bring all change into harmony with the fundamentals drawn from the past. If the past to a man is nothing but a dead hand, then in common honesty he must be an advocate of revolution. But if it is regarded as the matrix of present and future, whose potency takes many forms but is not diminished, then he will cherish it scrupulously and labour to read its lessons, and shun the heady short-cuts which end only in blank walls.*

—LOREN TWENTYMUTH



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## FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

Some four or five months ago, Dr Verrier Elwin sent me a typescript of this small book and suggested that I might write a foreword to it. It was easy enough to write a few lines, but I did not wish to do so before I had read the typescript. I would have been in any event interested in reading it as the challenge to us from the North-East Frontier Agency fascinates me. I was fully occupied with various activities at the time, and so I put this typescript aside for a leisure hour or two. That leisure did not come. A few days ago there was a gentle reminder from Verrier Elwin and I felt a little ashamed at having kept him waiting for all this time. And so, in spite of numerous other activities and engagements, including election work, I have read through this very interesting little book.

Verrier Elwin has done me the honour of saying that he is a missionary of my views on tribal affairs. As a matter of fact, I have learnt much from him, for he is both an expert on this subject with great experience and a friend of the tribal folk. I have little experience of tribal life and my own views, vague as they were, have developed under the impact of certain circumstances and of Verrier Elwin's own writings. It would, therefore, be more correct to say that I have learnt from him rather than that I have influenced him in any way.

I came across the tribal people first, rather distantly, in various parts of India other than the North-East Frontier. These tribes were the Gonds, the Santals and the Bhils. I was attracted to them and liked them and I had a feeling that we should help them to grow in their own way.

Later, I came in touch with the tribal people of the North-East Frontier of India, more especially of the Hill Districts of Assam. My liking for them grew and with it came respect. I had no sensation of superiority over them. My ideas were not clear at all, but I felt that we should avoid two extreme courses: one was to treat them as anthropological specimens for study and the other was to allow them to be engulfed by the masses of Indian humanity. These reactions were instinctive and not based on any knowledge or experience. Later, in considering various aspects of these problems and in discussing them with those who

knew much more than I did, and more especially with Verrier Elwin, more definite ideas took shape in my mind and I began to doubt how far the normal idea of progress was beneficial for these people and, indeed, whether this was progress at all in any real sense of the word. It was true that they could not be left cut off from the world as they were. Political and economic forces impinged upon them and it was not possible or desirable to isolate them. Equally undesirable, it seemed to me, was to allow these tribes to function freely and upset their whole life and culture, which had so much of good in them.

The reading of this book has clarified my mind and helped me to have more definite views on the subject. I agree not only with the broad philosophy and approach of Verrier Elwin, but with his specific proposals as to how we should deal with these fellow-countrymen of ours. I hope that our officers and others who have to work with the tribals of NEFA will read carefully what Dr Elwin has written and absorb this philosophy so that they may act in accordance with it. Indeed, I hope that this broad approach will be applied outside the NEFA also to other tribals in India.

I hope the reading of this book will not be confined to our officers, but that it will have a wider audience. Our people all over India should know more about this problem and should develop affection and respect for these fine people. Above all, I hope there will be no attempt made to impose other ways of life on them in a hurry. Let the changes come gradually and be worked out by the tribals themselves.

It is true that the isolated life that our officers live in some of these tribal areas is a strain on them. But they must remember that the problems they deal with are a challenge to us and that they are privileged to be engaged in this great adventure.

New Delhi,  
February 15, 1957

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

## FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

It is nearly twenty months since I wrote a foreword to this book of Dr Verrier Elwin. During this period, the question of our policy in the tribal areas has often come up before us. I am convinced now, as I was previously, that that policy should be on the general lines indicated in this book.

We cannot allow matters to drift in the tribal areas or just not take interest in them. In the world of today that is not possible or desirable. At the same time we should avoid over-administering these areas and, in particular, sending too many outsiders into tribal territory.

It is between these two extreme positions that we have to function. Development in various ways there has to be, such as communications, medical facilities, education and better agriculture. These avenues of development should, however, be pursued within the broad framework of the following five fundamental principles:

- (1) People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.
- (2) Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.
- (3) We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, be needed, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.
- (4) We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through, and not in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institutions.
- (5) We should judge results, not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved.

New Delhi,  
5th October, 1958

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU







## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Some time ago Mr K. L. Mehta remarked to me: 'Unless we are clear in our minds about what we are trying to do, unless, in fact, we have a philosophy behind all our activities, we may do more harm than good with the money and labour we spend.' This remark has inspired me to write down what I conceive to be the 'philosophy' which inspires, or should inspire, what we are trying to do in the North-East Frontier Agency of India.

In the two years since this book was first written there has not only been remarkable and exciting progress in implementing this policy, but the philosophy itself, especially as it applies to the tribal councils, tribal jurisdiction, the practice of shifting cultivation (Jhuming), the development of arts and crafts and the adaptation of local architectural designs, has been more fully worked out. When I first wrote I was frankly doubtful whether the policy I described would work. During the past two years, guided by the deep wisdom and concern for the common man of Mr S. Paul Ali, Governor of Assam, it has become clear that it can and does work under the right leadership, and I now have every hope that 'the rich and varied tapestry of NEFA' will not only preserve its lovely traditional colour and pattern, but that its material and techniques will be enriched.

As Adviser for Tribal Affairs, I am not technically a Government servant and this has made it possible for me to study the work of the NEFA Administration with some objectivity. This study has made me very proud of my association with it, and I have described it with an enthusiasm which might be considered inappropriate if I was in a different position. Mr K. L. Mehta, at present Adviser to the Governor of Assam, and I came to NEFA at the same time, and this has meant that for nearly five years I have had the happiness of working with him and enjoying his friendship. It is not too much to say that had he not been here, it would have been impossible to have worked out this philosophy even on paper, still less to implement it in the field. His singularly sensitive mind, so quick to grasp every aspect of a tribal problem; his realistic approach; his adventurous and pioneering spirit; his unusual sympathy and compassion; and his sincere affection for the tribal people and enthusiasm for their cause have

made him the best of counsellors and have put him among those who will be remembered by history as one of the great administrators of the tribal areas.

In the revision of this book I have also been inspired by discussions and even controversies (free to the scientist disagreement is the breath of life) with many of the officers of NEFA, and in particular I would express my gratitude for the help given me by Mr D. M. Sen, the distinguished jurist who is now Legal Adviser, and to Mr P. B. Kar, Director of Forests, in the NEFA Administration.

In his Foreword to the First Edition the Prime Minister expressed the wish that the reading of the book would not be confined to the officers of NEFA but would have a wider audience and that its broad approach would be applied to the other tribal people in India. I have therefore, in this second edition, tried to make my story more intelligible to readers in general by adding an introductory chapter about the people and administrative set-up of NEFA, and have given fuller treatment to many of the subjects I have discussed. There are some twenty million hill and tribal people in India and, though every area has its special problems, I believe that the example of what the Governor of Assam recently described as 'a model tribal administration' might well inspire the psychological approach, the technique of development and the general 'philosophy' of officials and social workers operating in other parts of the Indian tribal world.

I have called myself a missionary of Mr Nehru's gospel and it is from that point of view that I have approached the many problems facing us. I did not come to tribal India (now exactly twenty-seven years ago) from a school of anthropology, but from Gandhiji's ashram at Sevagram. I have always, I am afraid, been a very bad 'Gandhi man', but I have never forgotten some of the lessons he taught me. One of these was that, in his own words, 'we must approach the poor with the mind of the poor'—so too we must approach the tribesman with the mind of the tribesman. Another was the importance of simplicity: I saw something of Gandhiji's work in the villages of Gujarat where he based everything on the local economy, worked through local institutions, avoided luxuries and unnecessary innovations, and concentrated everything on a few fundamental and essential needs. And yet another lesson was the importance of the individual. The tribal folk are not 'specimens', 'types' or 'cases': they are

people; they are human beings exactly like ourselves in all fundamental ways. We are part of them and they are part of us; there is no difference. They live under special conditions; they have developed along certain special lines; they have their own outlook and ways of doing things. But the ultimate human needs, aspirations, loves and fears are exactly the same as ours.

With this background, I have tried to apply Mr. Nehru's humane and scientific ideals to concrete situations. To do this loyally and intelligently is, I believe, the chief source of hope for the people of NEFA and indeed for all the tribal people of India.

Shillong,

August 29, 1953

Vernon Erwin





## Chapter One

### THE NORTH-EAST FRONTIER AGENCY

*Upon the forest tribes in his dominions His Majesty has compassion... For His Majesty desires for all animals benign security, control over the passions, peace of mind, and longevity.*

—KING ANANDA

The history of what is now known as the North-East Frontier Agency reaches far hundreds of years into the mists of tradition and mythology. Of the vast hinterland there are only recent accounts, but a number of ruins in the foothills suggest some contact between the ancient rulers of Anam and the tribesmen living near the plains. Local tradition regards the country round Sudiya as the ancient *Vidurtilka* (though elsewhere this is identified with Betar) and the archeological relics at Bishmakhnagar in Lohit as marking the capital of King Bishmak, whose daughter Rukmini was carried away on the eve of her marriage by the Lord Krishna himself. The ruins of a fort at Bhulukpang on the right bank of the Bharill River in Kanem are claimed by the Akas as the original home of their ancestor Bhuluk, grandson of the Raja Rama, who was defeated, according to Puranic legend, by Krishna at Tsupur. A Kalita King, Barnachandra, driven from his kingdom in the plains, fled to the Datta foothills and established there his capital of Mayapore, which is probably to be identified with the ruins on the Ita hill, not far from Dimaikh in Subarneri. In the Lohit Division are the ruins of the copper temple Tameshwari, which at one time must have attracted many worshippers, and a place of great sanctity in the beautiful lower reaches of the Lohit River, the Bishmakhnagar, where Parasurama opened a passage through the hills with a single blow of his axe, which is visited every year by thousands of Hindu pilgrims.

The old records tell us little of the tribes, though the Mishuns must have visited the forts and temples of Lohit and probably helped to build them, just as the Dattas must have worked at Ita and the Akas at Bishmakhnagar. One of the earliest specific

reference to the tribes occurs in the account written by the character Shihabuddin, who accompanied Mir Junda when he invaded Assam in 1662. He says that the Dala tribe did not 'place its foot in the skirts of obedience' to the Ahom Raja, but occasionally encroached on his kingdom. He also tells us that the Mui-Miaimi women surpassed in beauty and grace the women of Assam and that the hill people greatly feared fire-arms, saying that 'the matchlock is a bad thing; it utters a cry and does not stir from its place, but a child comes out of its womb and kills men.'

The Ahom kings adopted a policy of *conciliation* towards the tribes, supporting it by a display of force when it could be effectively employed. Throughout the period of their rule their main concern was to contain the tribal people in their own hills and forests and to protect the gentle and unwarlike people of the plains, only sending out expeditions when there were raids of unusual audacity. When Raja Udayaditya Singha proposed to punish the Daltas of Sidiandi for carrying off a number of Assamese men, women and children, his Prime Minister declared that 'the Dala miscreants can be captured only if an elephant can enter a rat-hole.' The Raja ignored the warning and his expedition was defeated with heavy losses of men and provisions.

When the British took over the control of Assam from Purandar Singh in 1838 they found that the warlike tribes of the frontier had become even *more* aggressive as a result of the breakdown of the authority of Government, and for the remainder of the century they largely followed the policy of the Ahom kings. They did what they could to make friends with the tribes; they protected the plains people against their raids; they established outposts in the foothills, and from time to time imposed blockades and made punitive expeditions into the interior. In addition, a few daring explorers penetrated deep into the mountains, but it is doubtful whether they had any very great effect upon the outlook of the people, most of whom continued to resent visitors.

The first important step towards some kind of elementary administration, at least in the foothills, as well as for the establishment of more friendly relations, was the appointment of an Assam Political Officer at Sadiya in 1882. This was J. F. Needham, who continued there till 1903, making a number of



long years in hitherto unknown country, and remaining at his post for a sufficient time to win considerable influence. Another method of creating friendliness was through trade, and a number of fairs were held at such places as Udalgori and Sadiya from the sixties of the last century. In 1876 no fewer than 3,600 tribesmen were present at the Udalgori fair and in the same year there were 3,000 Miris, Mishmis, Khampis and Singphos at Sadiya. For a long time, however, the Aka refused to attend.

Thenceforward the task of creating better relations between the tribes and the rest of India continued slowly, though it was marred by such incidents as the murder of Williamson and Gregson in 1911, which led to serious conflict with the Aka of Sang. In the following year there was considerable activity on the part of the Topographical Survey, whose officers penetrated very far into the interior. Administration gradually extended and the whole tribal area was divided into the Balipara Frontier Tract and Sadiya Frontier Tract in 1919. In 1942, the Tirap Frontier Tract was carved out of the Sadiya Frontier Tract, and in 1946 the Balipara Frontier Tract was divided into the So-La Sub-Agency and the Subansiri Area. In 1948, the remaining portion of the Sadiya Frontier Tract was divided into two divisions, the Aher Hills and the Mishmi Hills. The Naga Tribal Area was at first administered by the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills, but in 1951 it was formed into a separate Division, Tuensang, within NEFA.

Finally in 1954, the Frontier Divisions were given their present names of Kameng, Subansiri, Sang, Lohit, Tirap and Tuensang, but at the end of 1957 Tuensang was re-united with the Naga Hills District as the new Naga Hills and Tuensang Area.

When we look back over the hundreds of years of constant conflict and compare it with the astonishing friendliness and ever-growing co-operation between the people of the hills and plains that we see today, we may well take pride in the achievement of India since Independence.

It would, however, be a mistake to assume that the entire history of NEFA was marked by hostility and resentment. It is true that the tribes made many raids on the inoffensive plains. It is true that in a few cases people were carried off for human sacrifices and as slaves. It is also true that there are very wide



differences in culture, language and outlook between the hill people and others. At the same time, however, there has long been a tradition of trade and mutual friendliness between the tribes of the foothills and the people of the Bradungpetra Valley. The Sherdukpen, and some of the Dalat, have intimate relations with the villages round Chanthar. The Nokes, who were early influenced by Vandinava preachers, have long had business connections with the merchants of Margherita. The Mishah have, for a century past, brought their special products to barter for cloth and other goods in the plains. Many of the leading tribal people, and particularly those along the foothills, speak Assamese and they are now learning Hindi as well. On the whole, however, the general effect of historical circumstances and the configuration of the country have tended to isolate the people of NEFA from the outside world.

### *The NEFA Administration*

The North-East Frontier Agency is constitutionally a part of Assam, with which it will be united when it reaches a sufficient stage of development. It is administered by the Ministry of External Affairs with the Governor of Assam acting as agent to the President. The administrative head is the Adviser to the Governor, and his Secretariat is situated in Shillong, where he is assisted by a Legal Adviser, an Adviser for Tribal Affairs, a Financial Adviser and the Heads of Departments for Health Services, Engineering, Education, Agriculture and Forests, whose work is co-ordinated by a Development Commissioner. The Adviser is also responsible for the unified and co-ordinated control of the Assam Rules to the Ministry of External Affairs through the Governor.

Each of the Divisions is under the control of a Political Officer who is supported by officers of all the technical Departments—the Divisional Medical Officer, the Divisional Agricultural Officer and so on. The Sub-Divisions are in charge of other Political Officers or of Assistant Political Officers, who have under them Base Superintendents and Area Superintendents.

In the middle of 1954 the Administration was reorganised on a 'Single Line' system, which has greatly increased the efficiency of its work and the spirit of co-operation between its officers. In







A scene on the new road built by Army Engineers, connecting Zibo, headquarters of the Szechuan Frontier Division, the former 'Hidden Land', with the plain

Shilling the Heads of Departments are integrated with the Secretariat, with the result that schemes can be examined and implemented expeditiously, the duplication of files is avoided, and any kind of narrow departmentalism eliminated. In the Divisions, the Political Officer is assisted by the representatives of the technical Departments who act as his advisers and frame plans in consultation with him, and he thus becomes the leader of a team who is responsible for their implementation and co-ordination. This means that there is no conflict between the development and political departments. It is now the custom that when a Political Officer goes on tour he takes a number of his technical officers with him so that at the same time many different types of activity can be implemented.

In the year 1956 the Indian Frontier Administrative Service was formed to provide a body of senior officers who have a special aptitude for serving in the frontier areas and are prepared to make a lifelong career of it.

The Second Five-Year Plan, in which an expenditure of a little over eight-and-a-half crores (including nearly three-and-a-half crores for the great and costly approach roads into the interior) has been approved, gives priority first to Communications, then to Food, and third to Health. No aspect of development is neglected, but these three needs are recognized as fundamental. The Plan has been carefully adapted to the social life and psychology of the tribes, and indeed much of this book is in effect a study of how this is being done.

The whole of NEFA might well be regarded as a National Extension Block. Whereas formerly the Administration was mainly concerned with Law and Order, today its chief pre-occupation is the welfare of the people. Although a number of formal NES Blocks have been opened, every administrative centre has been planned as a unit of progress and development, which will mean that with little additional staff, and with the best possible supervision, the Plan can go ahead over the whole of NEFA.

### *The Country and the Tribes*

There are over thirty thousand square miles of NEFA, hardly any of it flat. Bounded by Blanton to the west, the Tibetan and Sikkim regions of China to the north and east, and Burma



in the south-east, it is so mountainous, so cut about, chopped up and divided by countless streams, that on a month's tour you may well climb a total height exceeding that of Everest. Except for the riverain tracts near the plains, it has only been with the greatest difficulty that a few strips of level ground have been found for aircraft to land; scores of villages are on steep slopes, the houses rising above each other, where there is no place even to pitch a tent. This is a hard country, and nearly three hundred years ago Shihabuddin's associate, the Mulla Darwish of Herat, declared: 'It is another world, another people, and other customs . . . its roads are frightful like the path leading to the neck of death, fatal to life is its exposure like the unpeopled City of Destruction.' The great forests that clothe its hills, he says, 'are full of violence like the heart of the hyacinth.'

The Mulla was also struck by the capricious weather. The seasons begin here, he says, at the time of their conclusion elsewhere, and the sky 'sends down rain without the originating cause of clouds.' And indeed, although the regular monsoon begins in April and continues heavy, to as much as 200 inches in the year, until October, it may rain at any time, turning the little paths into nightmare lanes of slippery mud and tempting the leeches to attack the traveller.

This has made it difficult to live in NEFA and in fact only about half a million singularly hardy people do so. The nature of the country has done much to discourage visitors from the rest of India for, although it is easy enough today to visit the headquarters of the Division and even a few outposts where airstrips have been made, it still requires a major expedition to penetrate into the interior. For centuries the real ruler of the tribal people here has been Environment; it has shaped their bodies, directed their art, forced label on their tongues; it has been their Governor, their policy-maker; and today when we are challenging its harsh dominion, it remains our greatest enemy.

Yet the rule of the great lord Environment has not been all for the bad, and the tribesmen themselves have adapted themselves to it and even modified it. It has, for example, influenced their architecture, for almost all of them live in pile-dwellings raised well above the ground to avoid the damp. The countless streams and rivers, which become raging torrents in the rain,



have forced them to devise remarkable cane-bridges which, at their best, are marvels of untutored engineering skill. They would have starved, had they not evolved a type of cultivation under, so they say, the inspiration of the gods themselves, which could be practiced on the steep hillsides. In some places insect pests, and particularly the *dim-dan* fly, make life a torment, and have inspired them to weave cloth for their protection. The beauty of the countryside—the distant mountains white with snow, the nearer hills dressed in pine, oak and fir, the limpid green of winding rivers—has created in them a love of beauty, a sensitive taste and a desire to make good things. They spend their entire lives on a slant, and they have grown very strong, with exceptionally well-developed leg muscles, and the temperament and energy of real mountaineers.

There are compensations for a hard and dangerous life. In NEFA there are no landlords, no lawyers, no money-lenders, no liquor-vendors, merchants only in the foothills, and there is none of the economic impoverishment, the anxiety and the corruption that such people have brought to other, more accessible, tribal areas. Tribal art and culture, social organisation and traditional institutions are still strong and vigorous. The old religion is still a power for good and has not yet been touched by other systems; even Tibetan or Burmese Buddhism has had little effect on the



non-Buddhist tribes and there is little Hindu or Christian influence.

By dividing the people and keeping them short of what they need, Environment has given NEPA an age-old heritage of war. It has meant that many villages have been established for security reasons on the tops of hills and widely separated from each other; this has made the people dirty, for it is hard for them to get water. The Afghans live in small groups in order, so they say, to avoid quarrels between the clans and disputes about land. The heritage of war has given the tribesmen spears, swords, the ubiquitous and invaluable dagger, the cross-bow and the ordinary bow, and has made them good marksmen and expert hunters. It has made them adventurous and disciplined them. In certain tribes it has stimulated the corporate men's dominions, which were originally guest-houses for warriors.

All this has meant that NEPA has always been a country for the tribal people for, apart from officials, the number of non-tribesmen settled there is negligible. It is true that they have plenty of things to worry and irritate them, for that is the natural condition of human life. But they do not have imposed anxieties and irritations. They do not have to worry about some outsider taking away their land; they are not subject to the annoyance of superior persons telling them that their religious faith is nonsense and their customs bad. They have had their problems—slavery, opium-addiction, kidnapping, head-hunting, the blood-feud—which we have helped and are helping them to solve; they are serious, but they are their own.

I must now, for the sake of those who do not know NEPA, turn to a brief account of the Indo-Mongoloid tribes who live there. They are so many and so varied that to give a satisfactory introduction to them would require a work several times the size of this, and the reader must remember that this is not an anthropological treatise, but a practical book of problems and I have only room for an almost infographic account of an enormous subject.

In spite of differences in detail, there are things that are common to all the tribes. Each is broadly what the anthropologists call endogamous, and is divided into clans which they call exogamous. That is to say, members of a tribe usually marry within it; members of a clan always marry outside it. Inter-



tribal marriages are not taken very seriously, but a breach of the clan rules is a major social calamity. Some of the clans are totemistic, but most of them seem to have evolved during the course of their migrations from Tibet and Burma and their wanderings across the NEFA hills. Society is patrilineal; polygamy is common and there are traces of polyandry among the Gallungs and the Tibetan-influenced border tribes of the far north. Marriages are arranged by parents with certain kin or on a basis of exchange, though love-marriages are not infrequent. There is a good deal of premarital freedom among the younger people, but there is a high standard of fidelity within the marriage bond, though divorce is permitted.

There are social, but not caste, distinctions in many tribes, society being divided into the Chieftains or nobles, the middle classes, and slaves or servants, and inter-marriage between them is not usually permitted. But they all eat together and take their part in the tribal councils, festivals and dances. A released slave can be headman of his village, and the middle classes can produce the very influential shamans and priests equally with the aristocracy. The people are, on the whole, more prosperous (for there is more enthusiasm in their life and they are not exploited) than the ordinary Indian peasant and, as a result of their use of rice-beer, their diet is richer in food-values. Some of the Chieftains are well-to-do and can now afford expensive guns and even jeeps. Money values are coming in, but in the interior wealth is still calculated by the number of withams a man has, his sacred brass bowls and bells, his store of grain and his ability to entertain; the Apa Tainis, however, estimate wealth mainly in terms of land.

The people are surprisingly businesslike. Although it is only recently that they have learnt the use of money, they have developed an elaborate system of barter and they look on most things in a hard-headed, almost commercial, way. A marriage, which for us is an affair of romance, is for them essentially a matter of paying a bride-price, the settlement of which involves endless bargaining. Crimes and disputes are now generally settled on a basis of compensation. The institution of slavery is largely a business matter, with its investments in human lives, its dividends in human toil. The result of this is that some of the tribes, as I have said, are very keen traders. The Sherdukpens and Ahas have, for

generations, traded with the foothills and the plains. There is much inter-tribal commerce in northern Ssang. The Monpas, Khambas and Membas trade with Tibet, the Tangvas with Burma. The Mishams bring down musk and a *schistocapsa* (which contains valuable alkaloid berberine), as well as skins, textiles and baskets to barter in the plains.

Many aspects of the people's life and culture, their systems of cultivation, their food, architecture, arts and crafts, language, religion and jurisprudence will be discussed in later chapters. Let us turn now to a brief review of the tribes, moving from Division to Division, west to east.

### *The Country and the Tribes (a) Kameng*

There can be no better introduction to the people living along the international boundary than to go to a remote corner between Bhutan and Tibet in the west of the Kameng Frontier Division, where, on a plateau at ten thousand feet among high mountains, stands the great monastery of Tawang, founded some 350 years ago. This area is the home of the Monpas, a tribe distinguished for its terraced cultivation, its carpet-making and its love of horses, yaks and sheep.

Quiet, gentle, friendly, courteous, industrious, good to animals, good to children, you see in the Monpas the influence of the compassionate Lord Buddha on the ordinary man. They may have little theology; they have a great deal of religion. They are artistic too, even if their art is sometimes restricted by poverty to the love and decoration of flowers. But they nearly all have pretty things—a coloured sash, a decorated hat, a silver sword and little cups exquisitely painted of wood or china. They have a real dignity; they are people who like to do things properly. Presence, a certain gravity and order, manners, the ceremonial of daily life mean a lot to them.

It is cold here, the villages being at five to twelve thousand feet: Bomdi La, the headquarters of the Division, at more than 10,000, is said to be the highest administrative centre in the country.

The tribesmen, therefore, live in good cosy houses, double-storied, strongly constructed of stone or wood with plank floors, often with carved doors and window-frames. They dress well, in warm, durable and aesthetically pleasing clothes. They have ex-





A corner of the Linnery at Tawang





A Bugan dance. For many tribes dancing is serious ceremonial business

cellent taste; they love music and the dance and in the latter at least they excel.

The great monastery is the heart of Moupa life and culture. Fifteen miles away you can see it standing like a fort on its hill-side. The approach is like something from another world. As you go along, fires are made of aromatic leaves and branches and the smoke rises to purify the atmosphere. You pass through gate after village gate, the roofs of which are finely painted by local artists with scenes from the life of the Lord Buddha. At each village on the way, the people crane out to greet you, often with the village band of men blowing great trumpets and beating drums. A little tent is put up and adorned with flowers and you are made to sit down on decorative carpets and you are offered walnuts and Tibetan tea made with salt and butter and served in silver or china cups of real beauty.

The monastery itself reminded me of a mediæval Italian town or in many ways of Oxford. Here was the typical old Oxford jumble of little streets lined with tall houses; here was the gentle casual atmosphere which concealed so much formality and protocol. Here was the College Chapel, the Library, the Senior Common Room, the quad, even the kitchens were on a similar scale and had a similar unbluntness. The Abbot had some of the qualities of a true saint—a luminous beauty of character, a candid simplicity and unpretentiousness, an inflexible sword in a sheath of gentleness.

The Moupa Lamas are not perhaps very learned, but they have an infinite reverence for literature. There are some 700 books in the Library and their great treasure is the *Getompa*, three volumes of which are lettered in gold. This was brought out in much the same way that an Oxford librarian would produce a copy of the First Folio of Shakespeare; swarms were offered to it; and it was opened with rather reluctant devotion. There used to be a printing press here, and there are still hundreds of oblong wooden blocks carved with Tibetan characters.

There is also a reverence for the theatre, another Oxonian trait. Great wooden boxes contain an extensive wardrobe of costumes, masks and other props. The Lamas have a large repertory of what are usually called dances but are actually dramatic performances. There are clowns, warriors, birds and animals, Kings

and Queens. Most impressive of all is the Thutodzen, in which actors dressed realistically as skeletons portray the experiences of the soul after death.

But of course the life and heart of the Monastery is the great temple, with its colossal image and scores of smaller images, its colourful banners and its relics of the mother of the 8th Dalai Lama. On the Buddha Purnima day, when I was there, it was lit by a thousand lamps burning with quiet and steady flames.

The influence of Tibet and Bhutan is strongly marked in the Moupa noques and ornaments, architecture and iconography, their funerary rites and the Tantric elements in their Buddhism. In the past, most of their trade was with Tibet; today it is turning more and more to India.

To the south is a small Buddhist tribe, the Sherdukpen, which migrates to the low country for several months every year to trade with the plains and to avoid the cold. Then there are the Buguns (Khewas) and the Akas to the east and Mijis (Dhamrais) to the north, who are not Buddhists but have been



The Gompa at Rupa

influenced by their neighbours. The Buguns are very few in number, and for generations were oppressed by their neighbours. The Akas appear frequently in the history books and their Raja



Tagi, led a number of raids against the plains in the early years of the last century. These small tribes have adopted various elements of Tibetan dress and ornament, which they combine with silk cloth purchased from the plains. They are keen traders, retain the institution of slavery and have rather large houses.

In striking contrast to the cultured and gentle people of the west, the Bangnis or Dallas of the wild eastern part of the Division, which has only recently been brought under administration, have long had a reputation for turbulence. There are probably about eighty thousand of them and their villages extend east far into Subansiri. They have very long houses occupied by a number of related families with their slaves and servants and though there may be several such houses in a single settlement, they are not usually united into a village community. In the old days there were wars between houses in which their neighbours took no part and individual families often shifted their homes to other locations. In this the Bangnis differ from other tribes whose villages are permanent and often very old.

The Bangnis and Dallas of both Kameng and Subansiri are comparatively poor and have little in the way of arts and crafts. Few of them weave, though there is some work in bark-fibre. They have a little blacksmithery, a little pottery, but their best work is in cane. The men wear scores of belts round their waists which form a kind of armour.

In temper aggressive, reserved and suspicious, they have quarrelled among themselves for generations; there are still old blood-feuds taking their toll of human life and cattle-theft has long been common. They are, however, beginning to change and when they do, their strength and courage will make them admirable citizens.

Living among the Bangnis and Dallas are small groups of Suhings, who may be the aboriginal inhabitants of the country. They are essentially hunters and food-gatherers, but they also work well in iron and brass, and in recent times have taken to a little cultivation. Many of them are little better than slaves to the Dallas.

#### (b) *Subansiri*

At the end of 1890, an adventurous Tea Planter, H. M. Crowe,

decided to spend Christmas on the Apa Tani plateau. He had no escort; just a few Dailas to carry his stores and presents of beads, salt and silk cloth. He was the first, as far as we know, to penetrate so far into the interior. He was charmed and astonished, as all subsequent travellers have been, by what he found. For here in a remote, well-watered valley lived a society of highly organised, industrious people who had developed an extensive system of irrigated fields and, though ignorant of the plough,



Apa Tani woman  
(after Fynn-Hallamstedt)

succeeded with their bees in raising two annual crops for themselves and their neighbours. But they had no contact with the outside world; the Dailas prevented them going down to trade in the plains; and so they lived, fairly prosperous, fairly happy, in complete isolation until the eve of Independence. Today, at the Divisional headquarters on the Apa Tani plateau, aircraft land regularly; there is a large administrative centre, a demonstration farm, hospital, school, crafts centre, and Apa Tani have been to

Della and elsewhere. A visitor, revisiting Ziro after several years, was struck by the fact that, while the dress and life of the people remained unchanged, they were cleaner, more prosperous and laughed much more than they did before.

But the lovely valley and the energetic, businesslike Apa Tani, is not the last word about the Subaniri Division. The headquarters gives no hint of what lies beyond; here man has subdued nature to his own purposes and nature, accepting his conquest, has smiled upon him. When we go north, or indeed anywhere away from the enchanted plateau, nature resumes her supremacy and like any other tyrant frowns upon her subjects.

Here are the Tagins and Gallangs of the north, the Dailas to the west and south, and a group of tribes which have been called, for want of a better name, the 'Hill Muri'. They were hardly known before 1911, when the Miri Mission penetrated into their hills, and then there was a long gap until Dr G. von Furer-Haimendorf explored the country. Even as late as 1933, the Tagins wiped out a party of Amarn Rifles. I myself have been far to the north, among the Tagins and across the wild tangle of hills separating the Sipi from the Lower Kanula Valley. It was the most formidable, the most desolate, in a way the least



A Tugin house

rewarding country I have visited in over a quarter of a century of touring in the tribal areas. Here you realize what the struggle for existence means. The climate is abominable; the people are



under-nourished and tormented by diseases of the skin; the tracks are impossible. There is no art here, little weaving, little of the song and dance that delights tribal societies elsewhere; there is simply the long losing battle against hunger and disease. But today officers of the Administration have gone far into the unknown Upper Maas, and doctors and agriculturalists are bringing new hope to these neglected folk. A Sub-Divisional headquarters, in charge of a Political Officer, and an N. E. S. Block have been established at Dapurijo in the heart of the area, a place to which the words of the Prime Minister apply with special force: 'All over India we have centres of human activity which are like lamps spreading their light more and more in the surrounding darkness. This light has to grow till it covers the land.'

I have spoken of the Bangals of Kinnang, the Dallas and Hill Miri resemble them in many ways. Most of them tie their hair in a knot above the forehead, holding it in place with a long skewer or pin. The men wear attractive hats which project forward in a peak and then curve backwards, often with the class of a kite or porcupine quills attached. Apa Tsai men dress in much the same way, but are distinguished by a cane-belt which hangs down behind as a sort of tail, while their women wear large rings in the ears and wooden plugs on either side of the nose.

The traditional dress of the 'Hill Miri' women, which is rapidly going out of fashion, is 'elaborate and peculiar'. A short petticoat, as Dutton described it a hundred years ago, extends from the loins to the knees and is secured to a broad belt of leather which is ornamented with brass bosses. Outside this they used to wear a 'singular crinoline' of cane-work, fastened so tight round the loins that they had to move with a short mincing movement from the knees. Even today I have seen women wearing as many as a hundred cane bands and they are still evidently greatly attached to them, for they spend much of their time manufacturing new ones for themselves or their daughters. Formerly they wore nothing else of a skirt of grass, today they add a strip of cloth. They also have a remarkable band of woven cane and fibre which presses tightly across the breasts and entirely covers them; the only natural brasses I have ever seen among a tribal people. Masses of beads adorn the neck, many of them large turpise-like beads apparently of fine porcelain and others of

agate, cornelian and onyx as well as glass of all colours. The Tagins, both men and women, wear long coats of wool, of an attractive dark red colour, which they import from Tibet. They do little weaving themselves, though I found some Tagin women making thin belts of yarn spun from the hair of monkeys.

The Hill Miris are a handsome people and they not only look nice; they are nice. They are of a milder and more co-operative temperament than the Daflas or Tagins, and today overwhelm a visitor with friendliness.

Subansiri is the only part of NEFA about which a number of popular books have been written. We have Graham Bower's *The Hidden Land*, C. von Furer-Haimendorf's *Himalayan Barbary* and R. Izard's *In Search of the Barua*, an account of an expedition to find a fabulous monster supposed to be buried on the Apa Tai plateau. All these works give a vivid picture of the country as it was ten years ago. But readers of them should bear in mind that the situation today is very different: wars and kidnappings and cruel punishments, so fully described in these books, have come to an end. But they give an admirable account of the social life, the ideas, and the character of the people, and should be read by those who wish to understand more fully the background of the policies which I shall discuss later in this book.

### (c) Siang

From the earliest times until very recently the people of the Siang Frontier Division have been known as Abores, a rather derogatory word meaning 'unruly' or 'disobedient', which correctly described the idea which the plains people had of them in the past. Writing in the first decade of the last century, Hamilton records that 'the native of Nongang' told him that they were 'extremely savage', while another of his informants, 'the Brahman of Bengal', went even further and accused them of being cannibals and said that they had 'little intercourse with the people in Assam'. There have never been cannibals in tribal India, but it is true that the Abores have always been a proud, independent people, resentful of interference and suspicious of strangers. They were the last to take part in the markets of Sadilya; they kidnapped gold-washers on the tributaries of the Brahmaputra; they made many raids and put up a strong resistance to the punitive



expeditions that were sent against them. But Father Krick, more sympathetic than most of the officials of his time, epitomizes the Aboe character as he saw it in 1853. "The Padam is very active, jolly, a lover of freedom and independence, generous, noble-hearted, plain-spoken, more honest than the average Oriental, not over-moderate in eating and drinking. . . . He seems to possess much of the child's simplicity, and Membo is undoubtedly less corrupt than Paris."

The astounding change that has come over the Abors in recent years, transforming them into a friendly, co-operative, progressive community, has made the use of the old name inappropriate, and they themselves have suggested, and the Administration has accepted, that they should be called Adis or hillmen.

The word Adis today covers a large number of tribal groups, united by a language that in spite of dialectical variations is fundamentally everywhere the same, and by a similar culture and temperament. The Adis fall into two main divisions—the Minyongs, Padams, Pasa, Panggis, Shimongs, Boris, Ashings, and Tangams—and the Gallongs, with which may be associated the Ramas, Bokars and Pailangs of the far north.

An important feature of many Adis villages is the dormitory-club for boys and men, which organizes the youth of the tribe and is used for deliberations of the Kelung or tribal council. Many places also have separate clubs for girls, but the Gallongs and some of the tribes to the north-west for various reasons have not developed them. The Gallongs have a sort of polyandry, which is unknown elsewhere. Minyongs, Padams and Shimongs crop their hair, but the Gallongs let it grow long, and so do most of the northern tribes such as the Ashings, Tangams, Boris and Bokars. Many of the Gallongs had, until the art was revived recently, given up their looms, but in most parts of Siang the women are enthusiastic weavers. All the people love dancing and their *ponangs*, as they are called, are justly famous. The Adis are strongly democratic, but among those who keep slaves there are social divisions—freemen, freed slaves and actual slaves. They are great eaters and have unusual powers of memory, being able to recite interminable genealogies tracing their race back to the beginning of the world. They have a sense of history and the ability not only to look back into the past but forward to the



future, which is rather lacking in other tribes, and which makes them good planners for their own development.



Minyang Miki leading a dance

There are great contrasts in Siang. In the foothills to the south-east, on the right bank of the Siang river, there is the flourishing little township of Pasighat with a community of merchants recruited from the old headquarters of Sadiya which was washed away after the Great Earthquake, a high-school, an extension training centre, boys' hostel, H. D. sanatorium and T. B. hospital. It is the centre of a Sub-Division under a Political Officer. The main Divisional Headquarters at Along, with its beautiful river and valley scenery, is also rapidly becoming an important cultural and commercial centre. On the other hand, there are still wild valleys in the north where communications are difficult and the people retain all their old traditions of dress and custom.

Along the international frontier there are Buddhist tribes which resemble those I have already described as inhabiting the Tawang area, but are here known as Memos and Khamlas. They are

much poorer, both economically and culturally, than the Monpas, though the essential spirit of their Buddhism is equally strong. The Khambhas of the romantic and sacred Yang Sang Chhi Valley have maintained their remarkable dances, as have the Membas of



A clay Buddha, made by a Momba artist,  
in the temple at Gelling.

Gelling and they are now beginning to rebuild their shrines and temples which had fallen into a deplorable state of dilapidation.

The scenery of Siang is of unusual beauty. I have travelled its both banks of the Siang, the fabulous Tsangpo of the early explorers, all the way from Pangin to Gelling, and I shall never forget the great winding river, the forest-clad hillside and the snow-clad mountains of the north. The Siyom Valley is almost

is beautiful, and the Sika River, which flows into it, leads into the hills of the Bori, one of the most good-looking and picturesque tribes in NEFA.

(d) *Lohit*

Although the Mishmi Hills, in what is now known as the Lohit Frontier Division, are among the most formidable in the whole of India, they attracted more of the early explorers than any other part of the North-East Frontier. The surveyor Wilcox went there in 1827, the botanist Griffith in 1836, Rowlett in 1895. A few years later a Hindu sadhu, Puttananda Acharya, was murdered while trying to make his way from Assam to Tibet, and in 1854, Father Krick and another French missionary were killed on their way back from Tibet, an event which led to Eden's punitive expedition the following year. The Dibang Valley was explored in 1912 and two years later the 'Walong Penetration' penetrated the Lohit Valley almost to the international frontier. More recently the Kingston-Warke made extensive botanical investigations throughout the area.

Nearly all these early visitors came away with the lowest opinion of the Mishmis. Wilcox wrote that they were 'excessively dirty and as rude-looking as could possibly be imagined.' 'Excessively filthy,' echoed Robinson in 1841; their clothing was inferior, their cultivation 'very rude'. 'Disgustingly dirty,' adds Rowlett, varying the adverb for a change. 'A very wild roaming race of people, capable of the most senseless reprisals and massacres,' declared Butler. The general view, says yet another visitor, is that they are 'deceitful and bloodthirsty devils.'

I had read all this and when I first went into this wild country it was frankly with some apprehension. Within a few days I discovered the curious fact that these old botanists, administrators and traders seem to have had something wrong with their eyesight. Not one of them had ever bothered to say that the Mishmis were beautiful. And I was entirely unprepared for the wealth and beauty of their weaving designs, for their sense of colour and pattern, for the bright clean faces of the children, the shining white teeth—rare in a part of the world where the teeth are blackened or reddened with the eternal betel and lime—the friendly hospitality of everyone, and the quite wonderful coiffure



of the Tarao and Kaman women which would not disgrace a Parisian lady of fashion.

There are three main groups of Mishmis—the Digaro or Tarao, the Mizo or Kaman and the Chalikatta or Idu. The chief difference between them is in the way they do their hair. The Chalikattas—the very word means 'cropped hair'—cut their hair round the head very much as the Padams and Mnyongs do; in fact they live close to the Padams and there are traditions that the two tribes have a common origin. The Tarao and Kaman, however, both men and women, wear their hair long. All the groups are rather small in stature, with flat broad faces and a strongly Mongoloid appearance. Many of the clans seem to have migrated from Burma; their language has some affinities with Kachin, Chin and Lepcha.

Perhaps the most obvious feature of Mishma, like Dafa, life, which distinguishes it from that of most of the other tribes in NEFA, is the unimportance of the village community. Villages sometimes have only one house, and others consist of scattered buildings as much as a half-mile away from each other. The real social unit is thus the house, which often stands by itself in the forest or on a steep hillside. These houses are usually very large; a rich man's home may be a hundred feet long and fifteen or more feet broad. There is a long passage down one side and a number of rooms open off it, rather like a corridor train. Anything from ten to sixty people may live there.

The dress of the Tarao and Kaman is colourful and picturesque. They make most of it themselves, partly from wool, partly from cotton and sometimes of nettle fibre. They import from Tibet a very fine warm coat of many colours decorated with crosses, which made the early missionaries think, rather too optimistically, that they had come into a Christian country. The men wear a coat which may be black or maroon with ornamental borders, and a carefully woven cane hat. The Idu have a war coat, black with a white pattern, made of nettle-fibre, cotton and human hair which is strong enough to turn an arrow.

Tarao and Kaman women have long black skirts, sometimes with coloured stripes, a beautifully embroidered bodice and a shawl which is a triumph of the weaver's art. They are very good at colours, which never clash, are never loud or vulgar, and

have an admirable sense of pattern and can exaggerate and distort, piling theme on theme. They wear thin silver plates round the forehead, large trumpet-shaped ornaments in the ears, and hang round the neck very large loops of wire, though these are dis-



Ida Mishani woman

appearing before the more convenient strings of rupees and ordinary bazaar beads. Both sexes are fond of Tibetan charms.

The Mishani, men and women, are devoted to tobacco and you will seldom see them without a long silver or brass pipe between their lips. The Khamti and Tarnans have always been addicted to opium, but the Idas of the Dikang Valley, a harder and more warlike people, have never taken to it.

The greatest problem of the Mishani hills is how to get about. The Great Earthquake, which in 1950 shook Assam with, it is said, the force of ten thousand atom bombs, brought down great landslides, diverted the course of rivers and made a difficult terrain far more difficult. One of the most exciting aspects of travel in this area, besides of course the little tracks along the precipices, the landslides and earthquakes, are the bridges suspended high above the river-beds. The typical Mishani bridge is a rope of cane stretched from tree to tree across the water. Round this are large

cane rings in which the traveller is tied. He slides head first down the cable to the bottom of its sag and then pulls himself up the other side. The Siang tubular bridges can be alarming enough but the Mishmi bridges are far worse, and when that experienced traveller, Mr J. P. Mills, visited the Lohit Valley, he confessed that he had never been so frightened in his life.

Also living in the Lohit Frontier Division are a number of Palasas, allied to the Ache of the same name in the east of Siam, and two Buddhist tribes, the Singphos and Khampis. The Khampis immigrated from the Shan States of Burma towards the end of the eighteenth century; they were followed soon afterwards by the Singphos, a branch of the Kachins of Upper Burma, who lived formerly near the source of the Irrawaddy. Both tribes were at first warlike and aggressive: they combined to attack the Sadia outpost in 1859. Today they are peaceful cultivators and enterprising traders. Shri Chankhamun Gohain, who has been NEPA's Member of Parliament for two sessions, is a Khampi; he lives in a beautiful village on the banks of a river whose stream turns a dozen rice-milling machines. In Chankham and the other Khampi villages there are temples, many of them rather dilapidated, but embodying wonderful examples of local wood-carving. Buddhism retains its hold on the Khampis, but the religion of the Singphos has been considerably modified by a belief in witchcraft and sorcery and by the importation of local gods into its pantheon.

Both the Khampis and Singphos have been in touch with the plains for a long time and are more sophisticated than most of the other tribes. They are an enterprising and progressive people with a great future.

The headquarters of the Division is at Tezu, a prosperous little town on the banks of the Lohit River, and there is a Sub-Divisional headquarters at Reang, also under a Political Officer, which controls the Dihang Valley and the vast and even now little-explored northern hills.

#### (e) Tirap

In the old days, mothers in the plains of Assam used to rebuke naughty children by telling them if they didn't behave, the Rang-pungs would come and carry them off.



No one quite knew who the Rang-pangs really were, and in actual fact no such tribe exists, but they were supposed to live in fortified villages along the Patkoi Range which separates India from Burma. Thence they would descend on the plains, and carry off men, women and children to slavery and even for sacrifice. I once made a lengthy tour along the formidable slopes of the Patkoi and one day came to a valley which was said to be their traditional home. It was a valley to tempt the myth-maker to excess; I cannot think what Herodotus would have made of it. The hill descended precipitously to a roving stream cascading down from the great ridge above; winds thwarting winds, 'bewildered and lacerated', bent the trees before them; and on a crag above there was a lovely village, aloof, witch-haunted—the clouds lay low about it. Yet when I went there I found the people very agreeable; they were hospitable, friendly, kind, a little suspicious at first, but far from being the monsters of popular legend.

The Trip Frontier Division, a rather narrow strip of turbulent mountains dividing Manipur and the Brahmaputra Valley from the Burma border, is populated by several different tribal groups. The Wancho are the most virile and picturesque; the Noctes, who have adopted a very elementary form of Vaishnavism, have been most in contact with the plains; the Tangsas, who tie their hair in a top-knot and wear a sort of saring of a Scottish-plaid colour, have close links with Burma whence they migrated centuries ago, and are just emerging from an opium-dominated indolence into a new vigour and prosperity. Stunglun allied to those in Lohit, live in the fairly level forest areas near the plains.

Wancho and Nocte society is organized under great Chiefs, each controlling a number of villages from which he receives tribute. There are three classes, the families of the Chiefs, the proletariat and an intermediate class of the descendants of the sons of Chiefs who have married commoners. They do not keep slaves. The Chiefs' houses are often very large, probably the largest in the whole of NEFA, and the Noctes and Wanchos use massive blocks and pillars of wood which some of them carve with fantastic designs. There are Morungs for boys and young men in all the villages and in some places also dormitories for girls.

The Wanchos traditionally are not fond of clothes, but make

up for this by the use of splendid ornaments of ivory, bone, horns, shells and beads, while the more ephemeral grace of feathers and flowers distinguishes their ears and hair.



*Goumpipe used by the Tanjore of Tirup.*

The Noctes and Wanches were formerly head-hunters and the Wanchos in particular were expert in carving wooden ornaments of which the central motif was the human head. They wore them in their hair, round their necks and on their baskets. In one village I did not see any of them and was told that they had been destroyed. In the Chief's house there was a large portrait of the President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, hanging on the wall—for such pictures are presented to leading men on special occasions. I took it down to clean it, and there in a cache in the wall behind it were the missing wooden heads. I thought this was a fine contrast—the emblems of violence put away behind the great symbol of peace, the President of the India which is trying to bring tranquillity to a divided world.

### *The Imponderables*

Dr. S. K. Chatterji has said that it will be for the future to decide what influence the Kintu or Indo-Mongoloid population will have on the mentality and culture of India as a whole, and suggests that it will be a 'temperamental' rather than a material or spiritual contribution. This is an interesting idea and, though today there are signs that the Indo-Mongoloids may give a new and tonic inspiration to the textile and other arts, it is probably

ture that their most substantial contribution will be in the field of character and temperament.

It will be worth while, therefore, to glance at some of the psychological imponderables that distinguish the people of NEFA. The first is their exceptionally co-operative character. Every village works as a whole for agriculture, ceremonial, war and, lately, for 'development'. There are no heretics in religion, few dissidents in village society. The clan system still further unites the members of the various exogamous groups and extends the co-operative spirit over a field wider than the village community, to some extent counteracting the separateness caused by the great distances and the memories of war and feud.

Then the people are very self-reliant. The country is so hard and the conditions of life in the past have been so severe that only the strongest have survived. Even though until recently they have had little medical assistance and are still often short of food, many of them are splendid specimens of humanity. In the past they did everything for themselves, constructed their inter-village paths, built their bridges and gave relief to one another in times of need. Some of them have devised ingenious machines, worked by water, to husk or grind rice and millet. They have made their own cloth, their own hats and rain-coats; they have prepared their own cooking-vessels, their own substitutes for crockery; some of them even have their own cosmetics. They have made and administered their own laws.

Although for hundreds of years the tribesmen resented the visits of strangers, and even as late as 1913, when F. M. Bailey ran out of supplies at Diring Dzong he could not get anything to eat and was 'reduced to drinking a local form of tea which grew wild and tasted very nasty', their former attitude was probably due to a rather natural suspicion and fear; today they are the most open-hearted and generous of people, and the spirit of hospitality, which was always one of the most treasured of virtues as among themselves, is now extended to their visitors. Even the poorest will welcome you into his house and set something before you; it may be only a hard-boiled egg with a little rice-beer or tea, or it may be a grand feast of delicious rice with some wild bird or fish. There are class divisions in some of these tribes, but there is nothing remotely resembling caste, and highest and lowest, master



and slave or servant, rich and poor sit down together as friends and brothers. And if you are a friend and brother you can sit down too. When they visit the plains they cannot understand why they are not treated in the same way.

Although there is no patriarchy in NEFA, women hold a high and honourable position. They work on equal terms with the men in the plains and make their influence felt in the tribal councils. Women can become shamans and their intimate relations with the unseen world gives them great authority. Adi women, with dace in their hands and wearing sacred ornaments, often lead the ceremonial dances. There is an Aka Raul, wealthy and powerful, and the wives of the great Wancho and Noree nobles are very fine ladies, possessed of a natural grace and dignity; they have many privileges and social duties.

A belief in the importance of truth, a hardness of moral and physical fibre, courage before impossible living conditions, the love of adventure and exploration, a fresh, candid, simple attitude to life's problems are among the other qualities that the NEFA people have to give the world.

## Chapter Two

### THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM

*Separation and isolation are dangerous theories and strike at the root of national solidarity. Safety lies in union and not in isolation.*

—A. V. THAREKAR

The problem of the best way of administering so-called 'primitive', 'aboriginal' or 'tribal' populations has been debated for hundreds of years, and those people who even today so unflinchingly remind us, whenever there is a proposal for a scientific approach to the subject, that we must not keep them as 'museum specimens', are in fact only intervening in a very old controversy.

It is an interesting controversy, for it is linked up with several allied questions. Is mankind really progressing? Is civilization any good? Is the country better than the town? Is Man better in a state of Nature or of Art? Is the untutored 'savage' happier, more moral, in a word better than the sophisticated and urban product of the modern world? Mahatma Gandhi, inspired to some extent by Ruskin and Tolstoy, set thousands of people thinking about these questions, and it may be worth while taking a brief glance back through history to see what replies have been given in the past.

#### *The Classical Indian Tradition*

In the classical Indian literature, the tribes get a very mixed press. The first Aryan settlers in India regarded them with antipathy, characterising them as devils, man-eaters, black as crows, sprung from the sweat or dung of crows. The *Vishnu Purana* describes them as dwarfish, with flat noses and a skin the colour of a charred stake. The *Mahabharata* classifies them with the 'sinful creatures of the earth', akin to Chandalas, ravena and vikarna. The poet Bharavi opens his account of the Sabara army in his *Kadambari* with a procession of fifteen unflattering similes. The Sabaras were like 'all the nights of the dark fortnight rolled

his end, 'a crowd of evil deeds came together', 'a caravan of curses of the many hermits dwelling in the Dandaka Forest'. Their leader was 'wet with the blood of buffaloes'. 'Ah!' says Rama, 'the life of these men is full of folly, and their career is blamed by the good. For their one religion is offering human flesh to Durga; their meat is a meal loathed by the good; their *shantia* is the cry of the jackal; their teachers of good and evil are owls; their bosom friends are dogs; their kingdom is in deserted woods; their feast is a drinking-bout; their friends are the bees that work cruel deeds; and arrows, with their heads smeared like snakes, with poison, are their helpers; their wives are the wives of others taken captive; their dwelling is with savage apes; their worship of the gods is with the blood of beasts; their sacrifice with flesh, their livelihood by theft, and the very wood wherein they dwell is utterly destroyed root and branch.'

On the other hand, there are many passages which refer to the tribal people in friendly terms. A late passage in the *Mahabharata* describes how a Brahmin visits a village of Dasyus and finds them wealthy, truthful and hospitable. Even Rama cannot altogether withhold his admiration for the Sabara Chief. 'Horrible as he was, he yet inspired awe by reason of his natural greatness and his form could not be surpassed.' And he was certainly good to look at. He filled the woods with beauty sombre as dark lotuses, like the waters of Yamuna; he had thick locks curled at the end and hanging on his shoulders. To ward off the heat he had a swarm of bees which flew above him like a peacock-feather parasol. He was surrounded by hounds whose throats were covered with strings of cowries.

In the *Katha Sarit Sagara*, the great anthology of tales current in India in the eleventh century, we find a still kinder and almost romantic approach. It is true that some of the Sabaras, Hillas and Pulindas are described as brigands and cattle-lifters, practising human sacrifice. Yet they are attractive in their simplicity and have many virtues. Adorned with peacock's feathers and elephant's tooth, clothed in tiger-skin and living on the flesh of deer, they are famous for their dances and have sufficient social sense to recognise the institution of kingship. There is a Sabara king who is merciful and intelligent; he goes to find pearls on the heads of elephants and on the way meets an exquisite maiden.



siding on a fletch. Since she is 'like the digit of the moon resting in the lap of an autumn cloud', he at once thinks of his friend. Vasulatta goes to fetch him, takes him to the Himalayas, and arranges his contrivance with her. Here we have an important Hindu of good family, son of a rich merchant, cherishing the friendship of a tribal Chief. Indeed he considers that he has attained all that his heart could wish 'in having Manovati for a wife and the Sahara prince for a friend.'

The King of Vatsa also owes much to a Sahara who came from the mountains of the sunrise and guides him to find his wife. Vishnulatta describes another tribesman as performing an act of surprising courage, characteristic of men of mighty minds.

And Mrigankadatta says to the tribal King Mayavanti, 'When the Creator made you here, he infused into your composition qualities borrowed from your surroundings, the firmness of the Vindhya hills, the courage of the tigers, and the warm attachment to friends of the forest houses.'

The most famous reference to the tribes in Indian antiquity is in Valmiki's *Ramayana*, which describes how Rama and Lakshmana, in the course of their search for Sita, came to the banks of a lake or river, Pampa, lying to the west of 'Rishyamukhi's wood-crowned height', where an aged ascetic Sabari, belonging to the famous tribe of eastern India, had made her home. Knowing that her visitors were on the way, Sabari collected the fruits for which the place was famous and offered them to Rama for his comfort. She showed him the hermitage saying, 'See the charming great forest abounding in flowers and fruit, resembling a bank of clouds, filled with all sorts of deer and birds; this is famed on earth as Matanga's forest.' Rama then gave her permission to depart from this world, and in the presence of the two brothers, she went into a fire and ascended into the heavens, while all the sky was lighted by her glory.

There is, of course, no idea as yet of 'doing anything' for the forest people—rather it is they who are doing things for their rulers—but it is most significant to find, even so long ago, an attitude towards them which anticipates the friendliness and respect which has come to fruition in modern times. And in the figure of Sabari there is a symbol of the contribution that the tribes can and will make to the life of India.

### The Pastoral Tradition

Turning now to the Western world, we must first note what is called the pastoral tradition, which has always idealized the peasant and his simple life. It derived its ideas from the classical poets, Horace, Virgil and Hesiod, and even from such Latin prose writers as Cato and Columella, who wrote enthusiastically in praise of agriculture and farming. The life adumored by these authors was not altogether 'primitive'; it had its elements of comfort and decorum; but it was simple, obscure and self-contained, in sharp contrast to the meretricious and unhealthy life of the towns. Many English poets extolled it in some such terms as those used by Cowley in a translation of one of the Horatian Odes:

Happy the Man, whom bounteous Gods allow  
With his own hands Paternal grounds to plough!  
Like the first Golden Mortals happy he  
From Business and the cares of Money free!  
From all the cheats of law he lives secure,  
Nor does th' affrons of Palaces endure.

You will, of course, always find an enthusiasm for agriculture among people who have never handled a spade.

In the Middle Ages, at least in Europe, there was no problem of what to do for the peasant, still less for the tribesman. This came later with the discovery of the New World, with its exciting populations of primitive people, which brought the problem before the whole of Europe. Opinion, then as now, was divided. Some, of whom Montaigne is an example, were in favour of leaving them alone. He considered that the inhabitants of the 'unpolished and harmless world' of the hills and forests were naturally virtuous as compared to civilized man. In his essay, *Of Cannibals*, he declares that the American Indians are only wild in the sense that wild flowers are wild, but that in them are 'the true and most profitable virtues and natural properties most lively and vigorous.' Civilization has 'bastardized' these virtues, 'applying them to the pleasures of our corrupted taste.' He regrets that Plato did not live to see the discovery of primitive America, for he might then have given a better picture of the Golden Age.

Many other writers took the same view. Spenser has a gentle, noble tribesman in *The Faerie Queene*; Drayton enthuses over the



reports from America, Beaumont and Fletcher write of 'Savannah Indians, that know no other wealth but Peace and Pleasure'. And many deplored the corrupting influence of the first colonists and planters; Fuller spoke of Christian savages who went to convert heathen savages.

Other reporters, however, took a less optimistic view. We find the Indians spoken of as 'human beasts'; they are 'perfidious, inhuman, all savage'; Sandys says that the Indians, like the Cyclops, are 'un sociable amongst themselves and inhuman to strangers'.

### *Shakespeare on the Tribes*

It may surprise many readers to find Shakespeare quoted as having views on tribal affairs, yet in *The Tempest* he does make a serious contribution to what was then an urgent problem, the relation of the contemporary colonist with the aboriginal peoples of the countries in which he settled.

In this play, Caliban (whose name has been derived from Canib, an aboriginal of the New World, and cannibal) stands for the Indian, and Prospero for the colonist or planter, and the conflict between them reflects the current controversies about the character and status of primitive man.

Caliban, who is of a 'vile race', the product of witchcraft, 'a freckled whelp hag-born', scarcely human in appearance, 'as disproportioned in his manners as in his shape', is the original owner of the island on which Prospero and his daughter have been marooned. His own description of the process by which he loses his rights makes rather uncomfortable reading:

This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,  
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first,  
Thou strok'st me, and made much of me; would'st give me  
Water with berries in it; and teach me how  
To name the bigger light and how the less,  
That burn by day and night; and then I loved thee,  
And showed thee all the qualities o' the isle,  
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile:  
Cursed be I that did so!

Rebecca West has suggested that Prospero's 'treatment of the indigenous population, even though it numbered only one, would be hard to justify, according to the theory of natural law, for one



whose grievance against fate lay in the infringement of a rule recognized by that theory. His excuse for introducing the colour bar and poaching is not congruous with his special wisdom. Yet in taking over tribal territory, he does not neglect some measures of social uplift and education, and in this his daughter Miranda is a keen and efficient assistant. Even though they reduce Caliban to a mere slave and woodcutter, the 'pious' him, takes pains to make him speak, teaches him each hour one thing or another.

This is not altogether successful. As Frank Kermode has recently pointed out, 'Caliban's education was not only useless, but harmful. He can only absorb the gift of speech; and by cultivating him Prospero brings forth in him "the briers and darnell of appetites"'—but for Miranda, disconsent at his inferior position, isolation, intemperance of all kinds, including a disposition to enslave himself to the hands of Stephano. Such is, of course, the very common result, even today, of a too rapid acculturation.

Not only has Caliban been wronged, but in himself is not wholly without virtue, he has an ear for music and, like tribal people elsewhere, he has poetry at command, and for a moment speaks words of sublime beauty. And the representatives of civilization who follow Prospero to the island do him nothing but harm. Stephano and Trinculo are drunken buffoons; Antonio is a malicious degenerate; the life of Alonso is deeply stained with guilt. It is under the inspiration of these representatives of the modern world that Caliban takes to drink and turns treacherously upon his master. It is surely not without significance that Shakespeare shows us this primitive man becoming a 'footlicker' of a drunken butler.

Shakespeare's view, then, seems to be that although primitive man is not much good, contact with civilization can only make him worse.

### *Adam and Eve*

Throughout the seventeenth century, however, this realistic attitude was obscured by a widespread sentiment in favour of the innocent shepherd, the happy fustardian, the Christian Saint. Under the stress of the Civil War and the prevailing Puritanism of the Roundhead movement, 'Nature' and the country life became more and more idealized; it was here alone that man

could commune with God; it was here that the purest virtues could be practised. The most famous of the writers who infused the classical ideal of the Golden Age with a mystical enthusiasm was the Polish poet Słowacki, to whom the Biblical motif of the *hortus conclusus* or Earthly Paradise was a living reality. He seems to have influenced the Welsh Vaughan and the English Marvell, especially in the latter's garden-poems.

Along with this belief in the innocent beauty of the uncorrupted life of Nature went the theological problem of Adam and Eve. Today it may be a little difficult for us to take this famous couple seriously, but in the seventeenth century they were quite as real as any contemporary and far more cultured than Cromwell's Roundheads. The modern world, somewhat confused by the confusing theories of the evolutionists, is clear on at least one point; that the first men were not nearly as good as we are. They were either ridiculous dwarfs, with big wondering eyes, or unsmooth-skinned anthropoids; comic strips depict primitive man dragging his Eve about by the hair and knocking her over the head with a club for failing to clean the ears out properly. Milton saw things very differently. The first couple were 'of noble shape; erect and tall, godlike erect'. With 'native honour clad, in naked majesty', they seemed lords of all.

For contemplation he and valour formed,  
For softness she and sweet attractive grace.

It is true that, like the Boris and Dallas, they had plenty of hair: Adam's 'hyacinthine locks' being clustering to his shoulders; and as for Eve—

She in a veil down to the slender waist  
Her unadorn'd golden tresses wore  
Distempled, but in wanton ringlets waved  
As the vine curls her tendrils.

They were a lovely pair; 'truth, wisdom, sanctitude' inspired them; 'simplicity and spotless innocence' was, then's,

Adam the goodliest man of men since born  
His son, the fairest of her daughters Eve.

Adam and Eve in fact were created perfect—Aristotle is but the reverse of an Adam. The course of history was commonly supposed to have been steadily downhill, and civilization was a

steady corruption of what had originally been faultless. This led logically to Rousseau's back-to-nature movement in the following century.

### *Primitivism*

The result of this was the emergence of an attitude to life which has been called primitivism and has been studied in great detail by a number of American scholars, Lowiejoy, Ross and Margaret Fingemold. This has been divided into cultural primitivism, which regards modern 'civilized' societies as being, in all the fundamental values of life, better than civilized populations, and chronological primitivism, which holds that the earlier, pre-civilized periods of human life were the happiest and best. Adam and Eve were better and happier, partly because they were earlier in time, partly because they lived beyond the Iron Line that circled Eden.

Seventeenth century primitivism led to an increased interest in primitive peoples, and R. W. Frintz, in an important study of the travellers of the period, has pointed out that 'certain voyagers discovered, or thought they discovered, traces of a universal and fixed morality and the prevalence of three cardinal virtues—piety, benevolence and self-control—which seemed to be fundamental to all peoples, whether semi-civilized or totally savage.' The idealist was easily able to persuade himself that 'the good and noble life was to be lived not in towns and cities, but in the solitude of the American forests or the South Sea Isles.'

An interesting result of this was that, unlike later Imperialists who justified themselves as having to bear the white man's burden of native superstition and ignorance, the first colonists tried to encourage immigration to the tribal areas by painting their inhabitants in glowing colours. Thus when Walter Hammond wrote his pamphlet on Madagascar, he called the first of them (published in 1648) 'A Paradox, proving that the Inhabitants of the Isle called Madagascar, or St Laurence, are the Happiest People in the World'. Who then would not jump at the chance of going to live among them?

Primitives were further divided into 'hard' and 'soft'. In antiquity, says A. O. Lowiejoy in his *Documentary History of Primitivism*, 'the men of the Golden Age under the Saturnian dispensa-



tion were soft primitives, and the imaginary Hyperboreans were usually soft savages; on the other hand, the noble savages par excellence, the Scythians, and the Getae, and later on the Germans, were rude, hardy fellows to whom "Nature" was no gentle or indulgent mother; they were exulted for the fewness of their desires and their consequent indifference to the luxuries and even the comforts of civilized life.\* In more recent times, the soft, sensuous and elegant primitives of Tahiti or Bali have excited the admiration of artists and poets, while the virile hardy primitives of, let us say, the North-East Frontier of India have won the respect of soldiers.

Even at this comparatively early period, there is evident, in the attraction felt for the 'soft' primitives, a delight in the erotic freedom, the lack of inhibitions and the sexual innocence supposed to have been enjoyed by man before he was corrupted by modern society and its rules. It is significant that the expression 'the Noble Savage' did not originate, as is so often thought, with Rousseau, but with the amiable Mrs Aphra Behn, that ardent missionary of free love, whose poems, plays and stories constantly compare the advantages of the simple rural life with the frustrations of sophistication, and look back to fulfillment.

In that blest Golden Age, when Man was young,  
When the whole Race was vigorous and strong;  
When Nature did her wondrous dictates give,  
And taught the Noble Savage how to live...  
When every sense to innocent delight  
Th' agreeing elements unforced invite.

The hero of Mrs Behn's *Oroonoko*, though a 'native' of Surinam, is a great gentleman who found happiness by refusing to be 'civilized'. Mrs Behn was no anthropologist and she assumed, of course quite wrongly, that primitive man had no need for external government (which only exists to curb the greed and ambition of educated persons) and enjoyed all the raptures of free love.

Other poets of this century who exalted the primitive were Thomas Heyrick, whose poem, *The Submarine Voyage*, describes the people of the South Sea Islands as 'happy in ignorance' and 'strangers to care', and Waller who, in his *Battle of the Summer Islands*, draws an idyllic picture of the inhabitants of plannin-

shaded asails of scintuous beauty and ease. And the great Dryden himself, in a famous couplet, spoke of the happy days,

Err the base laws of servitude begun,  
When wild in woods the noble savage ran.

The last thing that the poets and travellers of this period wanted was to 'improve' or 'uplift' these aboriginals; what they desired was to go and share their lot. There was no question of keeping them in a museum; they wanted to enjoy their earthly paradise.

In the following century, the voyages of Captain Cook and other explorers provided factual support for these sentiments. According to Captain Cook, the 'savages' of Australia may indeed appear to be the most wretched people upon earth, but in reality 'they are far more happy than we Europeans, being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluities but with the necessary conveniences so much sought after in Europe; they are happy in not knowing the use of them.' And visits to Tahiti and the French Islands confirmed this picture of the Noble Savage.

This fitted very conveniently into the more advanced thinking of certain philosophers and revolutionaries, especially in France. The doctrine of original sin, it was supposed, was discredited by what Bougainville found in the Pacific. The child is happier and better than the man. The existing state of modern society appears decadent before the peaceful and truthful civilisation of the islanders; it must therefore be overthrown. Christopher Lloyd epitomises the views of Diderot, whose article on 'Savages' was so subversive that it was omitted from the Paris edition of the French Encyclopedia. In a remarkable dialogue, which he pretended was a supplement to Bougainville's Tahiti journal, Diderot 'accused his countrymen of acting the part of the serpent in this new Eden. He makes an old islander beg him to go away and leave the natives in peace. Otherwise such men as he will return with a cross in one hand and a gun in the other to enslave their bodies and poison their minds. For civilisation, according to Diderot, was indeed a kind of poison injected into the mind of natural man, thereby creating a sort of war within ourselves which lasts all our lives. Natural man is at odds with artificial man, and the best description of the unhappy product war, in the words of his friend Buffon, *Homme Duplé*.'



A similar view was expressed by the fur-merchant, D. W. Harmon, who spent sixteen years among the Canadian Indians in the early years of the nineteenth century.

'A very much question,' he said, 'whether they have improved in their character or condition, by their acquaintance with civilized people. In their savage state, they were contented with the mere necessities of life, which they could procure with considerable ease; but now they have many artificial wants, created by the luxuries which we have introduced among them; and as they find it difficult to obtain these luxuries, they have become, to a degree, discontented with their condition, and practise fraud in their dealings. A half-civilized Indian is more savage than one in his original state. The latter has some sense of honour, while the former has none. I have always experienced the greatest hospitality and kindness among those Indians, who have had the least intercourse with white people. They readily discover and adopt our evil practices, but they are not as quick to discern, and as ready to follow the few good examples, which we set before them.'

This attitude was not shared by everyone. Already in the eighteenth century Dr Samuel Johnson had declared it nonsense. Boswell, who after all had personally visited Rousseau, was all for the Noble Savage. Johnson was not. 'Don't rant in defence of savages,' he exclaimed, and when Boswell attempted to argue for the superior happiness of the simple life, he retorted, 'Sir, there can be nothing more false. The savages have no bodily advantages beyond those of civilized men. They have not better health; and as to cure or mental uneasiness, they are not above it, but below it, like bears.' He thought that the American Indians had no affection; had he been born one, he must have died early, for his eyes would not have served him to get food. One evening he poured scorn on those who preferred living among savages. 'Now what a wretch that must be, who is content with such consolation as can be had among savages!'

And now came the new European Imperialism and with it a great expansion of the missionary movement. Colonists and missionaries alike had to justify their existence by showing how necessary they were to the heathen world. Henceforth primitive man was painted in the darkest terms. Even in Java, as Bishop Heber suggested, though every prospect pleased man was vile, blind, beghotted.



Can we whose souls are lighted  
 With wisdom from on high,  
 Can we to men benighted  
 The lamp of life deny?

Darwin, who visited Tierra del Fuego in the course of the epoch-making voyage of H.M.S. *Beagle*, said that the difference between the Fuegian 'barbarian' and civilized man was greater than that between a wild and a domesticated animal, and he found it hard to see a 'fellow creature' in him.

We have come a long way from Cook and Hawkeworth, from Boswell, Rousseau and Diderot. To them primitive man was not fallen; he was better than modern man; we had much to learn from him; and the best thing we could do for him was to learn him alone. To the missionary and the colonist, however, primitive man seemed to exemplify the ancient doctrine of original sin, and it was above all necessary that he should be saved.

### *The Policy of Charles Dickens*

Charles Dickens, who strongly disapproved of the missionary movement, considering it more important to reform society in degenerate England than to send preachers to foreign parts, had a policy of his own. In a little-known 'reprinted piece', he declares that he has not the least belief in the Noble Savage, but considers him a prodigious nuisance. 'Howling, whistling, clucking, stamping, jumping, tearing', he is something 'highly desirable to be civilised off the face of the earth'.

Dickens draws on his enormous vocabulary and all his powers of invention to heap scorn on the unfortunate savage. He is 'real lake, thievish, murderous; addicted more or less to grease, cannals, and beastly customs'; he is a 'vomited, urinous, blood-dirty, unconscious humping.' He makes fun of the Zulu Kaffirs who were then being exhibited in London; they are, he admits, rather picturesque, but he cannot resist making fun of their methods of war, their marriage customs, their attitude to disease, their system of Chiefs. He parodies everything recorded about them in a manner that is itself far more savage than the unfeeling Zulus who were the objects of his contempt.

Another tribe which excited Dickens' scorn was the Offshoot Indian. Carlin had written 'a picturesque and glowing book'

about them, which the great man considered nonsense. 'With his party of Indians squatting and sitting on the table before him, or dancing their miserable jigs after their own starchy manner, he called, in all good faith, upon his civilized audience to take notice of their symmetry and grace, their perfect limbs, and the exquisite expression of their pantomime; and his civilized audience, in all good faith, complied and admired.' Yet as mere animals, they were 'wretched creatures, very low in the scale and very poorly formed.'

What irritated Dickens was not so much the savage himself, but the sentimentalizing over him—the 'whispering over him with maiden admiration, and the affecting to regret him, and the drawing of any comparison of advantage between the blemishes of civilization and the tenor of his swinish life.' It is extraordinary, he says again, 'how some people will talk about him, as they talk about the good old times; how they will regret his disappearance.'

Dickens concludes: 'My position is, that if we have anything to learn from the Noble Savage, it is what to avoid. His virtues are a fable; his happiness is a delusion; his nobility, nonsense. We have no greater justification for being cruel to the miserable object than for being cruel to a William Shakespeare or an Isaac Newton; but he passes away before an immeasurably better and higher power than ever ran wild in any earthly woods, and the world will be all the better when his place knows him no more.'

The result of this sort of propaganda, which was fairly common right up to modern times, was to give the peoples of the West a thoroughly low opinion not only of the tribes but even of Indian and African culture in general. When Swami Vivekananda visited America at the end of the last century he was amazed to find the misconceptions about Indian civilization that were current in spite of the labours of such European Orientalists as Max Müller and Sir William Jones. Later, the work of Miss Mayo encouraged those who wanted to believe that subject nations were not, and could never be, fit to govern themselves.

### *The Pendulum Swings Back*

Yet the pendulum swung back again, and the poets and artists regained the influence that they had for a time lost to the Church.

Picasso discovered African sculpture. Gauguin went to Tahiti. A score of poets exalted the simple life of nature. Ruskin and William Morris noted the value of manual labour and praised the art of unsophisticated people. The enormous authority of Tolstoy provided an atmosphere in which respect for the 'primitive' world could flourish. Matthew Arnold expressed what many felt even in the Victorian Age and what many probably still feel, about the impact of civilisation on simple, primitive folk.

O born in days when wars were fresh and clean,  
 And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames;  
 Before this strange disease of modern life,  
 With its sick hurry, its divided aims,  
 Its heads averted, its palsied hearts, was vile—  
 Fly hence, our contact fear!  
 Still fly, plunge deeper in the lowering wood!  
 Averse, as Dido did with gesture stern  
 From her false friend's approach in Hades men,  
 Wave us away, and keep thy solitude!

But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!  
 For wrong the infection of our mixed strife,  
 Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils for rest;  
 And we should win thee from thy own fair life,  
 Like or distracted, and like no mien,  
 Soop, soon thy cheer would die,  
 Thy hopes grow timorous, and with'd thy powers,  
 And thy clear aims be cross and shifting made;  
 And then thy glad perennial youth would fade,  
 Fade, and grow old at last, and die like ours.

Yet this escapist attitude could not be a real solution. The general attitude to primitive populations continued to be confused and inspired by largely sentimental motives. And then at the turn of the century, scientific anthropology began to come into its own. During the past two decades, the anthropologists have done a great deal to interpret what had at first seemed esoteric or merely curious; they showed that 'primitive' life had a meaning, that in various aspects were co-ordinated and each was important for the whole picture; there was a sort of architectural design in it. They did a great deal to change the attitudes, alike of sentiment or scorn, taken towards the 'savages'; even missionaries, of



the more intellectually respectable communities, took up the study of anthropology, with profit to themselves and their people.

Applied anthropology is of comparatively recent growth, but today there are few tribal areas in the world where professional anthropologists are not employed to advise their governments. They have stressed the importance of tribal systems of jurisprudence, the respect due to social and religious institutions, the need of combining sociological with agronomic studies in any attempt to improve tribal methods of cultivation. They have helped us to understand the difficulties of social change expressed, for example, in the extraordinary movements that from time to time sweep across tribal society, such as the Hashum cult of the Maris, the Pa Chun Hap of the Burmese Chins, the Cargo cults of New Guinea, and even the Mau Mau, and to realize, as Dr Raymond Firth says, that these must not be regarded as 'mere delusion, or as the product of "political" agitation, or as a simple reversion to savagery and atavistic thinking, but as phenomena manifesting strain in adaptation. They are attempts at a solution, albeit an ineffective and misjudged one, to the given difficulties of making old and new institutions, claims and values meet in a harmonious way.'

The new anthropology, based on observation and recorded fact, has helped the world to take a more balanced view of the entire problem.

And yet, especially since the Second World War, changed circumstances have raised new problems and made them more difficult to solve. In the popular Science Fiction of the last two decades, the value of a highly mechanized, and over-administered, civilization has often been questioned. In *Brave New World*, which is in effect an important anthropological study of the conflict between civilization and primitivism, Aldous Huxley examines the reactions of the 'Savage' taken from his Reservation into the world of tomorrow. He is 'poisoned' by it and ends by committing suicide.

To George Orwell, the 'poles' of 1984 were at least happier, because they were more independent, than the privileged members of the Party. In *The Bright Phoenix*, Harold Medford finds the 'barbarians' living in the jungles better and happier than the

regimented but well-provided citizen of the State of the Human Spirit.

The invention of the hydrogen bomb, the establishment over a large part of the earth of totalitarian governments, the ever-increasing power of the bureaucracy in the most democratic nations has made people of today rethink their whole attitude to civilisation and progress.

It is impossible to consider the fundamental problem of the tribal people without bearing in mind the context of contemporary society. Is it worth while making them part of a way of life whose standards we ourselves are beginning to doubt?

But after all perhaps our doubts are wrong. For the bombs, the secret police, the tortures in hidden prison cells, the taxation, the corruptions, the intrigues are not the last word about the modern world. There is a great fund of goodness; there are executions, but there is also mercy; there are countries curtained off with iron, but there are other lands where the wind of thought blows freely and men can speak their minds. There is art, beauty, comfort, health, and the ideal of freedom from want and fear.

The difference in our outlook on the future of the tribal people today is this. Formerly, the priests and poets said: 'Because these people are noble and good, there is no need to do anything for them.' The reformers, the uplifters, the clergy said: 'Because these people are ignoble, superstitious and miserable, we must do something for them.'

We say: 'It is just because we believe them to be noble and good that we want to do all we can for them. We do not do this because we pity them, we do it because we respect them. We do it because we believe that we can bring them the best things of our world without destroying the nobility and the goodness of their's, and that one day in their turn they will help us.'

### *The Problem in Modern India*

When we turn to modern India we find the same fundamental problem and people, according to their temperament and upbringing, still asking much the same questions.

Is there not a case for the view that by and large the tribal people will probably be happier if they are left alone, or at least very largely alone, in the grandeur and freedom of their hills?



Gallong and Minyoma girls. From a painting by Sitavan Chauda





*Khamti Mishis in the Khamti Valley*

'They lack many of the amenities of life, but on the other hand they are free; no one masters with them; they are able to live according to their own religion and traditions. Voltaire's *Candide*, after exploring all the civilisations of his contemporary world, came to the final conclusion that there was no greater happiness than in cultivating one's own garden. Why not let them do so?

On the other hand it is argued, would it not be better to 'civilize' them as rapidly as possible? Their life is nasty, brutish and short; their art is crude, their religion a medley of superstitions; they are dirty and diseased. The early explorers and administrators tumbled over one another in their use of uncompromising adjectives to describe the people of NEFA. The Simgpas are described as 'a rude ferocious people', the Khaupis as 'a discomfited, restless, intriguing tribe', the Nagas as 'a very uncivilized race with dark complexions and hideously wild and ugly voices'; the Abors are 'as void of delicacy as they are of cleanliness'. As Dickens urged, surely the only thing to do is to civilize them off the face of the earth.

Few of us today would adopt either of these views in their entirety, certainly not if they are expressed in so crude a form. Yet the two policies have both been advocated and followed, in India during the past fifty years.

### *The Policy of 'Leave Them Alone'*

The British Government inclined, on the whole, to leave the tribesmen alone, partly because the task of administration, especially in the wild border areas, was difficult and unrewarding, partly from a desire to quarantine the tribes from possible political infection, and partly because a number of officers sincerely held the view that the people were better and happier as they were.

This policy is commonly attributed to the influence of the anthropologists who are invariably accused, whenever the subject is discussed, of wanting to keep the tribal people in zoos or museums for their own purposes. In the Legislative Assembly, during a debate on the Excluded Areas in February 1936, a number of speakers attacked anthropologists as wishing to keep the primitive people of India 'uncivilized' and 'in a state of barbarism' in order to add 'to their blessed stock of scientific



knowledge? It has always puzzled me how this curious idea arose. It is true, that I myself, writing many years ago when India was under British rule, advocated a policy of *temporary* isolation for certain small tribes, but this was not to keep them as they were, but because at that time the only contacts they had with the outside world were *debasing* contacts, leading to economic exploitation and cultural destruction. Nothing positive was being done for their welfare, national workers were not admitted into their hills; but merchants, money-lenders, landlords and liquor-vendors were working havoc with their economy and missionaries were destroying their art, their dances, their weaving and their whole culture.

But a policy advocated to meet a set of special circumstances does not hold when those circumstances have changed, and neither I nor any other anthropologist would dream of suggesting such a policy since Independence. I agree entirely with Dr H. S. Gupta who wrote in 1951:

'Complete isolation has never led to progress and advancement, but always to stagnation and death whether we look to lower animals or human beings.

'On the other hand, the history of human society shows that civilisation everywhere has been built by the contact and intercourse of peoples, which has been the chief motivating power behind progress. There are innumerable instances of the borrowing of cultural traits by peoples of different countries, such as articles of food, use of metals, domesticated animals, methods of agriculture, spread of the alphabet. So long as the borrowing has been casual and in harmony with the cultural setting and the psychological make-up of the people, it has been entirely beneficial and even added to the richness of their culture.'

As I have shown in the preceding pages, it is the literary men, the artists, the poets, the philosophers who have wanted to keep the tribal people as they were: the artist Gauguin has probably had more influence on the modern attitude to the 'primitive' than all the anthropologists put together. In any case, the scientists are just not interested in that sort of thing. They are more concerned with developing than with static societies, with culture-change rather than with culture 'as it is', and the blessed stock of scientific knowledge is thus more likely to be augmented when the doors of the ego are thrown open than when they are kept



closed. But since this appears to worry people, let us briefly consider what is wrong with the policy of isolation.

It is exposed to at least three important criticisms. In the first place it has rarely been implemented in practice. There are some twenty million tribal people in India, and before Independence little was done for them. At the same time, they were not in actual fact left alone. As I have said, they were exploited by landlords and zamindars, robbed by money-lenders, cheated by merchants, and their culture was largely destroyed by foreign missionaries.

Secondly, the belief in the happy care-free Noble Savage is a myth, except perhaps in the South Seas long ago. In NEFA at least the people had not enough food; they suffered from abominable diseases; they died young; they were heavily burdened with anxiety; their life was distracted by war, kidnapping, slavery and cruel punishments. They were not even free: weaker tribes had to pay tribute to the strong; rich and powerful Chiefs grew richer on the labour of hundreds of serfs; freedom of movement was severely restricted by inter-village conflict.

And thirdly, while isolation was possible in the last century, it is impossible today. Modern industry is transforming the whole world; the humanitarian ideals of a welfare state no longer permit the neglect of any section of the population; political necessities forbid the existence of any administrative vacuum on the international frontier; tribal leaders themselves demand greater opportunities. And no one (least of all the scientist) wants to keep the tribal people as museum specimens for the benefit of science.

The NEFA Administration has been accused of isolating the hill people from the people of the plain, the most current charge being that they are doing this by making the national language the medium of instruction in schools.

This, of course, is nonsense. The Administration is not isolating the tribal people at all. Indeed, if it is to be criticised, it might rather be on the ground that it is bringing them a little too quickly into the main stream of modern life. It is pressing forward everywhere with roads which will make the plains easier of access; it is encouraging both the national language and Assamese to help the tribesmen to communicate more readily with the outside world; it takes schoolboys on tours round India and

send parties regularly to New Delhi on great occasions; it is awarding stipends to its outstanding boys and girls to study in various parts of India; its officers are penetrating into the wildest regions with the message that beyond the hills there is a friendly world with a desire to help and serve.

But the NEFA Administration believes that advance in these long-neglected areas must be on scientific lines. When a man breaks a long fast, he is not immediately given a full meal; he takes a sip of orange-juice. Otherwise he may fall seriously ill. To learn from history, to follow the universally accepted principles of sociological science, to dig firm foundations is not to delay progress; it means that *real* progress will be made.

### *The Policy of Assimilation*

In sharp contrast to the first policy is a second one of assimilation or denationalization. This has now become popular and Christian missionaries, social reformers and village upstarts are following it, sometimes on a large and enthusiastic scale. For this too there is something to be said. The Christian missionaries have produced a number of educated tribesmen who are proving of great value to the country, and not least to the NEFA administration. Assimilation into Hindu society has sometimes led to a better way of living and to economic advance.

In general, the supporters of this policy take a rather poor view of tribal life; 'animism' should be replaced by the purer ideals of Christianity or Hinduism; the social organisation, the 'vicos', the 'superstitions' should go; tribal dress is a mark of inferiority and should be replaced by shorts and shirts, blouses and frocks. You cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs, and the continued existence of the tribes as tribes is regarded as of less importance than the march of civilization.

Denationalization is a possible solution of the future of India's tribesmen. It is simple and easy, and it sometimes works. It has, however, serious disadvantages. Its type of progress is by a break with the past, not by an evolution from it. It tends to make the tribesman ashamed of his own culture and religion and so creates that inferiority complex which is a political as well as a social danger. Although it favours a few gifted individuals, who are able to assimilate the new way of life, it generally deprives



the most of the people of their standards and values without putting anything comparable in their place. All over the world it has been noted that the break-up of tribal society leads to a loss of the tribal virtues and a rapid acquisition of the vices of civilisation.

The weakening of tribal solidarity and of the folk-legal sanctions deprives the younger generation of their moorings and leaves them adrift in an unfamiliar world. All too often, the arts and crafts, the music and dancing, the former self-reliance and independence, the corporate discipline disappear. At the same time, throughout tribal India there is a tendency towards the transformation of tribes into castes, and these 'castes' are usually at the bottom of the social scale. In areas where free commercial penetration has been permitted, there has been much economic exploitation, inevitable among a people who but yesterday learnt the use of money and who are simple and trusting.

A detailed account of the dangers of this line of approach has been given in an anonymous memorandum on 'The Impact of Modern Civilization on the Tribal Peoples of Madhya Pradesh', with special reference to the situation in Bastar, a wild tract of country, largely inhabited by tribal populations, which presents many parallels to NEFA. From this I take the following extracts:

'On contact with their more advanced neighbours, whether through educational institutions of a secular as well as religious character, such as those of the Missions, or through contact with them in work, such as in the mines, it is a generally observed fact that the result is that the virtues of truth and honesty are lost first. It would seem therefore that the break-up of tribal society inevitably leads to a loss of the tribal virtues and a rapid assimilation of the vices of civilisation.

This is due to the weakening of tribal solidarity and of the folk-legal sanctions. The man who has gone away to the mines, or the youth taken from his community and put into a school, considers himself free of, and, indeed, superior to the laws, regulations and customs of his "backward" parents and relations, and needs little inducement to adopt the vices he sees being practised in the urban civilisation into which he has been introduced but which, had he remained with his own people, he would have scorned.



Not only has contact with a higher civilization this effect in the moral status, but it is equally disastrous in that of craftsmanship. At a time when our erosion and declining fertility of the soil is bound to become an ever-increasing cause of anxiety, the developing of cottage industries as a secondary source of livelihood becomes increasingly important.

But at this actual juncture, the very existence of the surviving folkways and industries is threatened. At Jajdalpur, one may see the tribal people in the bazaar buying metal and other articles, brought in large quantities by merchants, and which were made in Raipur or even further afield.

How great is this exploitation by commercial interests of the tribal people may be seen when it is realized that they will walk anything up to forty miles to Jajdalpur or Koudagum<sup>1</sup> to sell in the bazaar a few eggs, muskoxen or other products for a total value of one or two rupees. When they have acquired this money, representing the whole stock of the profit of their husbandry, they will then spend it on some article which formerly they would have made for themselves.

Therefore commercial penetration of these regions, which is going forward at an ever-increasing rate as roads are developed, is threatening to extinguish, on the one hand, folk-crafts and, on the other hand, draining the region of what little money it may have.

In the immediate neighbourhood of Koudagum there are villages occupied by tribal people who are now virtually in process of detribalisation. One of the results of this process is that, while it is the declared policy of the Government to abolish casteism, casteism is here in the making. Such tribal people have worked out a caste relationship (to one with the other, and all with the structure of the surrounding Hindu population, the result of which is that each one forms a caste below the other, and all below the lowest neighbouring Hindu castes.

To see this in active operation throws light upon how caste, in many cases, may have arisen in the past, as a result of similar clashes of culture and races, but, other than a matter for observation of great academic interest, it is an undoubted development. For it would mean that as all these tribal peoples become absorbed

<sup>1</sup>Jajdalpur is the chief town of Bastar, and Koudagum, in the heart of the Munda country, is a sub-divisional headquarters.

by their neighbours, they would form lowly camps beneath them, thus perpetuating not only a system which the Government desires to abolish, but a form of isolation and exploitation of the tribal peoples which is contrary to universal ethical standards. The fact alone would suggest the desirability of avoiding the absorption of the tribal peoples and the destruction of their own distinctive civilization.

Under these circumstances the tribal peoples, whether as individuals drifting into the surrounding populations, or as deculturized tribes, are destined to be exploited by the more advanced populations if the tribal societies are broken up and if, in addition, an adequate measure of protection for them is not afforded by the Government.

'Therefore cultural penetration, leading to deculturizing of the tribes, is a menace of a very serious order to the well-being of these peoples.'

History is full of warnings of this kind and we will make a serious mistake if we lightly ignore the findings (which so far as I know are almost unanimous) of scientists who have approached the problem without bias and with the sole aim of achieving the best and happiest way of life for the people whom their studies have taught them to respect.

The fundamental point is that tribal society, and even the tribal physique, has been adapted through hundreds of years to a special kind of life in a special environment, and that there is grave danger in upsetting too rapidly the harmony between the two.

For example, Dr Buchi, the Swiss biologist, points out that the pygmy Onges of Little Andaman are perfectly adapted to the tropical sun and the dense forests of their environment. They do not represent an 'old and primitive form'; physically they are not at the beginning but at the end of a specialization. Moreover, their type is not the product of a planless evolution; it is one marvellously adjusted to the world they live in.

'In this high specialization, however, lies also a great danger. The adaptation is not only physical, it is a complete biological adaptation to the given circumstances. Contact with civilization changes these circumstances and creates situations for which these people are not prepared, conditions for which they have no powers



of resistance. Changes in their way of living, the introduction of diseases and luxuries previously unknown to them may have a catastrophic effect and may lead to their complete extinction in a short time.

It is comforting to know that attempts are being made to spare the Onges such a fate. Contact with civilization cannot be avoided today. The missionaries, however, are trying their best to keep the destructive influences away and to bring these survivors of a special branch of mankind under control without destroying their normal environment.

In an important paper on 'The Indian Aborigines and their Administrations', which appeared in the *Journal of the Atlantic Society* in 1951, Dr R. S. Guha has pointed out that the history of civilized man's relation with primitive folk falls into two distinct phases, an initial period of conquest and spoliation, and a subsequent period when attempts are made to 'induct to some extent the wrongs done to them and recognise their right of existence and own mode of living.' The first contacts of the aboriginal populations of the New World, Oceania, Africa or South-East Asia with the outside world were disastrous: 'the once proud and warlike Red Indian tribes of the U.S.A., living in tipis and hunting the bison on horseback, were reduced to one quarter of their estimated total strength.' In Australia many of the aborigines suffered the same fate, while the native Tasmanians were reduced from 7,000 to 120 by 1764, and in 1876 'the last representative of this ancient race passed away from this world, a sad commentary on civilized man's solicitude for the aboriginal' and indeed a curious commentary on the romantic attitude towards him described earlier in this chapter.

But even during the second period, when attempts were made to protect and help the tribal people, the trend of depopulation continued. In America measures for stopping exploitation were not very successful, and Dr Guha points out that between 1887 and 1923 the Red Indians were swindled out of ninety-one million acres of land and, with the exception of the Navaho, showed a rapid decline in population, for which the chief causes were exploitation, lack of adaptability and loss of a will to live. Similarly in Australia, Melanesia and Polynesia, official commissions and scientific investigations conducted on behalf of British scientific associations revealed that the very high rate of decline in the



population was due to economic exploitation leading to the disappearance of original arts and crafts, psychological ills and unwillingness to shoulder the burdens of life.

Of these, the latter was undoubtedly the most important and was the outcome of the disintegration of tribal culture and authority. When contact with a higher culture takes the form of a clash, and tribal patterns and values are too quickly replaced by others of a different order, primitive man is unable to adapt himself to changing conditions and an upsetting of the harmony and balance of his life takes place. This disquieting feature reveals itself in a significant change in the birth-rate with high mortality. It was found among all the aboriginal tribes in Canada and the U.S.A. that this was the danger-signal marking the onset of a decline in population.

It is thus essential to 'supply the machinery for enabling the tribesman to adjust himself to the changing conditions of his surrounding environment, and until this is done on the basis of his cultural potentiality and cultural accessories, no amount of spoon-feeding or uplifting measures are likely to be effective.'

#### *The Prime Minister's Policy*

Is there any way out of this dilemma? We are agreed that the people of NEFA cannot be left in their age-long isolation. We are equally agreed that we can leave no political vacuum along the frontier; that we must bring to an end the destructive practices of inter-tribal war and head-hunting and the morally repugnant practices of slavery, kidnapping of children, cruel methods of sacrificing animals and opium-addiction, none of which are fundamental to tribal culture. We wish to see that the people are well-fed, that they are healthy and enjoy a longer span of life, that fewer babies die, that they have better houses, a higher yield for their labour in the fields, improved techniques for their home-industries. We would like them to be able to move freely about their own hills and have easy access to the greater India of which at present they know little. We want to bring them into contact with the best people and the finest products of modern India.

Above all, we hope to see as the result of our efforts a spirit of love and loyalty for India, without a trace of suspicion that Government has come into the tribal areas to colonize or exploit,

a full integration of mind and heart with the great society of which the tribal people form a part, and to whose infinite variety they may make a unique contribution.

And at the same time, we want to avoid the dangers of assimilation and de-tribalisation which have degraded tribal communities in other parts of the world.

Is this possible?

Mr Indira Gandhi has asked the same question. After visiting the Kulu Valley, she was impressed by the need to help the villagers in their life of poverty and hardship. Yet she admits to a 'baking iron' in the back of her mind. 'How would this opening-up affect the valley and its attractive people? Would contact and competition with the "civilised" people of the plains not destroy their charming naivete? Cannot greater comfort and material gain be achieved without lessening the people's spiritual quality? Is there no way of improving the economy and bringing in better education, health and transport services without also introducing the malaises of the plains, which might cause a weakening in their vital touch with nature?'

There is a way. It is not an easy way, but I believe it may be found in the middle path between doing too little and doing too much, on which the genius of the Prime Minister, Mr Jawaharlal Nehru, has set our feet. His policy may be summarised as one which approaches the historical development of tribal life and culture with respect and the people themselves in a spirit of affection and identification that eliminates any possibility of superiority. It would not ignore the past, but would build upon it. It would bring the best things of the modern world to the tribes, but in such a way that they will not destroy the traditional way of life, but will activate and develop all that is good in it.

In a number of remarkable speeches, Mr Nehru has spoken of the strong attraction which he has for the tribal people and has described how he has always approached them 'in a spirit of comradeship and not like someone aloof who had come to look at them, examine them, weigh them, measure them and report about them or try and make them conform to another way of life.'

He has given serious warnings of the dangers of the 'assimilation' approach. Pointing out the disastrous effect of the 'so-called European civilisation' on tribal people in other parts of the world,



'putting to an end their arts and crafts and their simple ways of living', he has declared that 'new to some extent, there is danger of the so-called Indian civilisation having this disastrous effect, if we do not check and apply it in the proper way.' 'We must be careful in uprooting them from their way of life with its standards and discipline, and give them nothing in its place. We may make them feel ashamed of themselves and their own people and thus they may become thoroughly frustrated and unhappy. They have not got the resilience of human beings accustomed to the shocks of the modern world and so they tend to succumb to them.' We must, therefore, be very careful to see that 'in our well-meant efforts to improve them, we do not do them grievous injury.' 'It is just possible that, in our enthusiasm for doing good, we may over-shoot the mark and do evil instead.' 'It has often happened in other areas of the world that such contact has been disastrous to the primitive cultures and gradually the primitive people thus affected die out.'

'I am alarmed,' he has said again, 'when I see—not only in this country, but in other great countries too—how anxious people are to shape others according to their own image or likeness, and to impose on them their particular way of living.' He has declared that he is not sure which, the modern or the tribal, is the better way of living. 'In some respects I am quite certain their's is better.' 'They possess a variety of cultures and are in many ways certainly not backward.'

'We must cease to think of ourselves as different from the so-called tribal people. This is a vicious idea. It is due to a superiority complex which has no basis in reality. I can say with complete honesty that some of the tribal peoples have reached a high degree of development, in fact I have found that in some places they are highly educated and disciplined and lead a corporate communal life which, I think, is far better than the caste-ridden society from which we suffer.'

The Prime Minister has further emphasised the importance of encouraging the tribal languages, so that they will not only prevail but flourish. He has insisted that a measure of protection must be given so that 'no outsider can take possession of tribal lands or forests or interfere with them in any way except with their consent and goodwill.' It is his desire that the high sense of



discipline, the power to enjoy life, the love of dance and song will ensue among them. 'I am anxious that they should advance, but I am even more anxious that they should not lose their artistry and joy in life and the culture that distinguishes them in many ways.'

Schemes for welfare, education, communications, medical relief are no doubt essential; 'we must always remember, however, that we do not mean to interfere with their way of life, but want to help them to live it.' 'The Government of India'—and in this sentence Mr Nehru's entire policy is epitomized—'is determined to help the tribal people to grow according to their own genius and tradition; it is not the intention to impose anything on them.' Development, he has said again, 'must be according to their own genius and not something that they cannot absorb or imitate and which merely uproots them. I would much rather go slow in our plans for development than risk the danger of this uprooting. I feel, therefore, that it is unwise to try to do too many things at the same time there which may result in disturbing the minds of the people or in upsetting their habits. I have no doubt that development and change and so-called progress will come to them, because it is becoming increasingly difficult for any people to live their isolated life cut off from the rest of the world. But let this development and change be natural and be in the nature of self-development with all the help one can give in the process.'

These ideas have been emphasized by a number of the country's leaders. The President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad, has written:

'There can be, and should be, no idea or intention of forcing anything on them either by way of religion, language or even mode of living and customs. Even when we feel that the religion or the life that is offered is better than their's, there is no justification for forcing it upon them against their will. My own idea is that facilities for education and for general improvement in their economic life should be provided for them and it should be left to them to choose whether they would like to be assimilated with, and absorbed by the surrounding society, or would like to maintain their own separate tribal existence. In India with its variety of life, there is enough room for the tribal people to carry on their separate social existence if they so desire. If they find

however that from their own point of view it would be better for them to get assimilated, they will do it without any large-scale effort on the part of others. In other words, personally I am for service to them uninfluenced by any consideration of winning them over for particular groups, religious or other. It is only in that way that we can win their confidence, and even for raising their standard of living and improving them educationally, it is necessary to win their confidence first.'

In a similar spirit Pandit G. B. Pant, Union Home Minister of India, has emphasized the contribution that the tribal people can make to the life of the country. He is reported as saying in a recent conference at Koraput that:

'India is a vast country with a rich variety of culture and topography and in this sense of diversity our tribal brethren occupy a very important place. The tribal people have been truly described as an artistic creation of God passionately devoted to their own way of life. They express their joy of life through the colourful forms of their folk-dances and the rhythm of their music.'

'Their frankness, love of truth and unshakable loyalty to those who win their confidence are well known. They are literally sons of the soil, and the skill with which they create neat and clean habitations and meet the other requirements of life are a matter for admiration.'

'It is wrong, therefore, to consider these people less civilized or backward. They are our own kinsmen and non-tribals can learn many good lessons from their way of life.'

Mr Jairamdas Doulatram, former Governor of Assam, has expressed the same idea in a striking simile:

'Each section of our large population contributes to the making of the nation in the same manner as each flower helps to make a garden. Every flower has the right to grow according to its own laws of growth; has the right to enrich and develop its own colour and form and to spread its own fragrance to make up the cumulative beauty and splendour of the garden. I would not like to change my roses into lilies nor my lilies into roses. Nor do I want to sacrifice my lovely orchids and rhododendrons of the hills.'

And Mr S. Fazl Ali, the present Governor, speaking of the 'human and sociological adventure' on which the NEFA Administration is engaged, has said:

'Our approach to the tribal people must be conditioned by human understanding and must be free from any traces of superciliousness or condescension. The people of NEFA are sensitive



and intelligent and though they might occasionally be bewildered by the advances of an unfamiliar world, yet I think they will be disposed to greet this advance with all the friendliness of their unquarrelled and hospitable nature. They are observant and intelligent and are deeply conscious of the natural dignity of their simple ways of life.

We must, therefore, approach them not with any feeling of civilised superiority, but with a genuine spirit of service and seek to learn from them at least as much as we would like to teach them. They must be made to feel that it is their own property and happiness which we are anxious to promote. If we try to change their traditional modes of living too rapidly or too rigidly in accordance with our pre-conception of what a civilised social order should be, they might be easily led to believe that we are seeking to disturb their way of life or to uproot them.

We must follow the golden mean between leaving too much alone and interfering too exclusively in their daily life. It is our duty to go ahead with the task of removing their pressing needs and doing everything which will really add to their happiness and prosperity and broaden their outlook. But they should not be overwhelmed by a multiplicity of projects in such a way as to undermine their self-reliance without eroding their enthusiasm. More important than the number or magnitude of such projects is the effectiveness with which we can demonstrate the usefulness and desirability of those that we find necessary to take up in their interest. Even a few schemes well and conscientiously executed will, I think, serve to arouse the enthusiasm and co-operation of the tribal people who will then be able to realise on their own way the advantages of more intimate association and contact with the rest of India.

This policy is not unique; very similar ideas have been expressed by John Collier in America, by Rattray in Africa, by Macdonald in Burma. But I think it is unique to find so many of the great figures in the public life of a country so filled with concern and speaking with so unanimous a voice about its tribal population. And I am sure that there has seldom, or never, been so sincere and energetic an attempt to implement the policy as is now being made in NEPA.

This attempt to steer a middle path between the two older ways of approach is hard and delicate: it demands imagination, sincerity and constant care. The substitution of decentralisation policy, which held, as we have seen, that there is not very much to be said for tribal life: that if it disappears, it will not matter greatly,



that the 'backward' must be brought forward and the low 'uplifted', is simple and straightforward; it is logical and it brings certain benefits—at a price. So did the old British policy of leaving well alone, though at a different price.

But there can be no doubt that Mr Nehru's policy is the right one. It is supported by the findings of anthropological science and the warnings of history. It is a charter of religious, social, economic and cultural rights. It is the embodiment of the spirit of reverence. It is the gospel of friendliness and equality. It is the gate whereby the tribal people may enter into full union with the India of which they form so important and valuable a part.

Today we can see the tribal peoples without sentiment, but equally without prejudice. Isolation in the modern world is impossible; it would not be desirable even if it was possible. The old controversy about race and museum has long been dead. We do not want to preserve tribal culture in its colour and beauty to interest the scientists or attract the tourists. To try to preserve and develop the best elements in tribal art, religion and culture is something very different from wishing to keep the people in a zoo.

We do not want to preserve the tribesmen as museum specimens, but equally we do not want to turn them into clowns in a circus. We do not want to stop the clock of progress, but we do want to see that it keeps the right time. We do not accept the myth of the Noble Savage, but we do not want to create a class of Ignoble Serfs.

We see now that the tribal people will be of the greatest service to India if they are able to bring their own peculiar treasures into the common life, not by becoming second-rate copies of ourselves. Their moral virtues, their self-reliance, their courage, their artistic gifts, their cheerfulness are things we need. They also need the comradeship, the technical knowledge, the wider world-view of the plains. The great problem is how to develop the synthesis, how to bring the blessings and advantages of modern medicine, agriculture and education to them without destroying the rare and precious values of tribal life.

We can solve this problem if we do not try to go too fast; if we allow the people a breathing-space in which to adjust them-

advers to the new world: if we do not overwhelm them with too many officials; if we aim at fundamentals and eliminate everything that is not vitally necessary; if we go to them in genuine love and true simplicity. In a word, if we follow Mr Nehru's policy, there is a chance we may succeed; if we do not, it is certain we will fail.

### Chapter Three

## MATERIAL AIMS IN NEFA

*India, like other underdeveloped countries of the world, is a poor country. The majority of the people are underfed, under-employed or unemployed. They lack proper housing, clothing, sanitation and the like. Living under these uncongenial conditions, they have almost lost the faculty of clear thinking. It will indeed be a mistake of effort if we try to teach people about proper dietary requirements when they do not have the means to procure even one good meal a day. There seems to be no use in trying to teach them what an ideal home should be like or what should be the proper sanitary measures when they are hungry and without adequate clothing or shelter. The basic requirements must be supplied first before we think of educating them. Adequate employment must be provided for every individual, so that he can earn his living in the most modest way by honest labour and not through charity. Charity can alleviate distress or poverty for the time being, but cannot be a permanent solution of the problem. On the other hand charity makes a man lose his moral strength and confidence in his own ability.*

—ASHADUTI ARYANAVARAM

Mahatma Gandhi, talking (so far as I remember) to a young man who was a little too exclusively interested in culture, once declared that 'the masses need only one poem—invigorating food.' The material aim of NEFA must necessarily therefore take the first place, for the people are often hungry and often sick. There is nothing more important than the provision of concrete material benefits for the common man. The 'philosophy' of NEFA must be built on a contented stomach, a clean skin, healthy lungs and a fertile womb.

Yet even here the first of our material aims is at least partially a psychological one. We want the people to produce more food; if they are to do this with enthusiasm, they must feel that they own



the land they cultivate. In other parts of India, where the tribal communities have declined in many ways, the first cause of their depression was the loss of their land and forests. This had the effect of so enervating the tribal organism that it had no interior resistance against infection by a series of other evils. A Bishop was once talking to Samuel Johnson about the poor. 'They grow quite wretched,' he said, 'for want of property.' And Johnson replied, 'They have no object for hope. Their condition cannot be bettered. It is growing without a port.'

### *The Problem of Land*

To the tribal mind, Government's attitude about land and forests is as important as any scheme of development or education. If we look back over the long series of rebellions against authority in other parts of tribal India, we see that the majority of them arose over this one point. Thus the Kol insurrection of 1831 was caused by encroachment on tribal land. 'The Tamar rebellions, repeated seven times between 1769 and 1832, were primarily due to the illegal deprivation of their rights in land which the Hos, Mundas and Urasins had suffered.'

The story of the great Santal rebellion has been told by Dr J. H. Hutton in *Modern India and the West*. He shows how the excellent original intentions of Government to protect the people were eroded by the tide of civilization, so that gradually all the best land passed into the hands of outsiders. And elsewhere a missionary, Mr W. J. Childers, has written well on the same theme:

'The most powerful motive in Santal life is possession of the land which they till. Land belongs to those by whom the original clearing in the forests were made, and passes through the male line to their descendants—remaining always within the same clan. The Santal village officials received special lands as recognition of their services and of their office. No motive is so strong in a tribal people as the preservation of the life of the tribe and its mores, often the motive works for the most part at the unconscious level; and a Santal's land not only provides economic security, but is a powerful link with his ancestors; and this applies to newly-entered areas no less than the old, for he will not take possession till the spirits approve. The land is a part of his spiritual as well as his economic heritage.'

Tungar drove the Santals to despair, but their attachment to the land provided also an emotional basis without which the rebellion might not have taken place.

Anxiety about land or the active exploitation of it by outsiders has led to many other disturbances, such as the Rampa rebellion in East Godavari, the Bastar rising of 1911, the civil disobedience in the Kendu Mahals of Orissa. A comparatively recent rebellion in the Adilabad District of Hyderabad in 1941 was due partly to the alienation of Goud land, partly to the reservation of forests which was extended over all areas which were not actually under cultivation at the time, even though they had in former years been cultivated in rotation. Many Gonds and Kolams lost their ancestral lands, were forced to seek a living by working for non-tribemen, and rebelled in despair.

Ownership of land in NEPA varies from tribe to tribe though, generally speaking, it can be considered under the three categories of land owned by individuals, land owned by the clan and common village-land. Tribes which practice jhumming and those which have taken to regular cultivation will naturally have rather different systems of ownership. Of the latter almost our only example is the Apa Tani community which, confined in a comparatively small area, has evolved a very strong sense of private possession. Dr C. von Furer-Haimendorf, writing in 1944, has pointed out that an Apa Tani's influence and social status depends largely on his property in land. 'Land is the source of wealth and all other land less permanent possessions are mainly valued as a means of acquiring more land.' He has described the three types of ownership as follows—

The first category comprises practically all cultivated land, irrigated rice-fields, fields for dry crops, garden plots for maize, millet, vegetables and fruit trees, groves of bamboos, pines, and other useful trees, as well as sites for houses and granaries.

Clan-land consists of meadow land near the village used as pasture and burial-grounds and tracts of forest, situated at a very great distance from the village, where only the members of the owner-clan have the right to hunt and trap.

Common village-land is confined to one or two usually not extensive stretches of pasture, and to forest tracts on the periphery of the Apa Tani country.



Land can be bought and sold by the Apa Tani among themselves, but traditionally it must be fattured for live-stock. You can buy other things with money, but not land.

The tribes which maintain themselves by shifting cultivation have a somewhat different system. There is first the area, established by old tradition and agreement with neighbouring villages, which is regarded as belonging to the village as a whole; all the inhabitants are concerned to preserve the integrity of its boundaries, which are clearly marked by streams, hills or great trees. They do not generally, though they may, erect artificial boundary-marks, for everybody knows exactly where they should be.

Nearly every village was originally settled by the members of a single clan, who cleared the forest and endured all the hardships of pioneers. These are the ultimate owners of the land, the title to which passes to their male descendants. There is a sense in which all subsequent settlers, especially those of other clans and in the smaller villages, are tenants, though in practice they act as full members of the village community. What usually happens is that when a member of another clan is given permission by the council to settle in a village, he is allowed to clear and reclaim a tract of forest which has never been used or has fallen into disuse, or he may borrow land from a family which has more than it wants. Such unsettled land is the property of the village which gives a right of ownership to the family which clears it. Where land is borrowed, however, and particularly when the new settler is not of the founder-clan, he is entitled only to use the land so long as he resides on the spot; he cannot transfer his holding even to his own descendants without the permission of the council; and should he go elsewhere his land reverts to the village as a whole.

Individual ownership is thus established within a main framework of communal possession. Each family acquires rights over the plots which it has cleared, and in the course of time each has a number of such plots in different places within the general village area. There is nothing to prevent them cultivating them as they wish, but in practice the hills for ploughing are selected annually by the council in consultation with the priests, and the whole village takes up the same general area, for otherwise, since ploughing is very much of a co-operative enterprise, any dissident



would not have the assistance of his neighbours in felling the trees and in fencing, where that is done. All the various agricultural operations, in fact, such as clearing the forest, burning the *jhums*, sowing or sifting the seed, weeding, fencing and reaping are done by everybody at the same time with the appropriate religious ceremonies.

Nothing is paid by families who wish to extend their cultivation into the land held in common by the village, nor by settlers, but in fact there is a considerable investment in every piece of forest cleared. The task of cutting the trees in a *jhumi* is long and arduous, and every new cultivator has to go to no little expense on sacrifices to the spirits of the hill and forest which he is invading. This helps to impress on the people that the land is their's.

Government's attitude to land in NEFA is formulated in the three *Jhumi* Land Regulations which were promulgated in 1947-48. These regulations give the tribal population absolute rights over their *jhumi* land which is defined as 'all lands which any member or members of a village or a community have a customary right to cultivate by means of shifting cultivation or to utilize by clearing jungle or grazing livestock, provided that such village or community is in a permanent location.' A village or a community is considered to be in a permanent location if it always remains within a specific area, although the whole or part of it may migrate from time to time to different locations within the area. In most parts of NEFA, however, shifting cultivation does not usually mean shifting homesteads, for many of the village locations are very old.

The Regulations also provide customary rights to *jhumi* land in favour of any village community which has cultivated or utilized it for a certain period. This also applies to any individual cultivator if he has inherited the land, or purchased it before 1947, in accordance with local custom; and if he, as a resident of a permanent village, has brought under cultivation land which had not been used at any time within the preceding thirty years. In actual practice, however, the local customs and traditions are respected, and take precedence over these regulations.

The transfer or sale of land is strictly controlled and in actual fact, since the whole area is beyond the Inner Line where outsiders

are not normally permitted to settle and where no tribesman can sell his land to a non-tribesman, it will be seen that there is very considerable protection of tribal land.

The Inner Line Regulation was enacted in 1873, not with the aim (as is so often thought) of isolating the hill people from the plains, but to bring 'under more stringent control the commercial relations of British subjects with the frontier tribes.' In Lakshimpur the operations of speculators in chouchouc had led to serious complications, and the spread of Tea Gardens beyond the fiscal limits of the settled territories of the day had involved Government in many conflicts with the hillmen. The Inner Line Regulation, therefore, enacted that no British subject or foreign resident could pass beyond a certain point without a licence; it also laid down rules concerning trade and the possession of land beyond the Line.

The tribal people are bound to their land by many and intimate ties. Their feeling for it is something more than mere possessiveness. It is connected with their sense of history, for their legends tell of the great journeys they made over the wild and lonely hills and of the heroic pioneers who made the first clearings in the forest. It is part of their reverence for the dead, whose spirits still haunt the countryside. The land is the mother who provides for them in response to the labours of their hands and who, when supplies run short, feeds them with a hundred natural gifts. It is the setting of adventure, in love, in hunting and in war, which can never be forgotten. The land is the foundation of a sense of security and freedom from fear; its assured possession is a lasting road to peace.

### *The Problem of the Forests*

This leads us on to the problem of the forests. I have myself recorded the melancholy story of the effect of reservation on the Baigas of Madhya Pradesh in my book on that tribe. Nothing roused the Saenias of Orissa to such resentment against Government as the taking from them of forests which they regarded as their own property. Of the Bhuiyas and Juangs of Bomai and Kanchhar, I wrote in a report in 1942:

It is necessary for us to appreciate the attitude of the aboriginal. To him the hills and forests are his. Again and again



it was said to me, "These hills are ours; what right has anyone to interfere in our own property?"

Before this claim is dismissed as wholly fantastic, we would do well to remember that had these folk the wit and education to make regular claims at the time of the early settlements, they might today be legally settled in the possession of the great estates on which they have lived for centuries. I do not suppose the courts would uphold their claims today—but if they have no legal rights, they surely have considerable moral rights in the areas they have possessed so long. They have lived in these remote and inaccessible hills, racked by malaria, fighting a constant battle against wild beasts and unfriendly Nature, paying their State dues year after year and receiving literally nothing by way of public services in return, and yet no rights or liberties are legally granted to them.

A Census Officer wrote of the tribal groups in Bomaiy State in 1931:

"The incursions of the Forest Law on the hill and aboriginal tribes have been considerable. Previous to the creation of the Forest Department, hill tribes roamed the forest areas more or less at will and were generally the sole purveyors of forest produce.

... It is true that the Forest Department employs a fair number of the forest folk but the actual net benefit derived by them from the existence of a systematized administration is probably a good deal less than the profits formerly obtained from the almost uncontrolled exploitation of forest areas and is thus poor consolation to a simple and illiterate member of the hill and aboriginal tribes, whose solitary desire is to live and let live."

This will be sufficient to emphasize the extreme value, both material and religious, attached to the land and the forest by the tribesmen elsewhere: the feeling in NEFA is, if anything, even stronger. A recognition of this must be the background of any attempt on our part to solve the problem.

We may well remember the words of Sir Rampdyde Fuller (in 1901): "It is of much more importance that a tribe of people should live in peace and comfort, than that a certain area of land should grow trees of one sort or another or indeed should grow trees at all."

The present forest policy in NEFA is one of exceptional liberality and is based on an official circular which declares that it "must be conditioned by the direct interests of the people and not



by our desire to increase revenue by launching upon a policy of exploitation of forests identical with that in other parts of the country.'

Everything possible is being done, within the framework of the Jhum Land Regulations, to guarantee the rights of the tribal people over their traditional forests. In all the thickly-populated parts of NEFA there are already well-defined traditional village boundaries which are coextensive, and it is now proposed to record them on maps. Most of the land within these boundaries has come, at one time or another, within the jhum cycle.

There are, however, considerable areas, especially in the foot-hills, where the population is so small that there are tracts of forest which do not really belong to anyone. It is proposed that these should be declared reserved forests under the Forest Department in the interest of timber conservation. In some other tracts where there is a very small population, there are plans for a sort of provisional reservation.

There are three categories of forests in NEFA. The first embraces those which have already been constituted into Forest Reserves, actually a very small area. The second includes forests which have not so far been brought under reservation but where the population is so sparse that no rights, collective or individual, have been established. The third category covers forests definitely within the traditional village boundaries, even though they have not yet been demarcated on the ground.

Now under the procedure followed in the rest of India the second and third categories would be regarded as 'Unclassed' State Forest, which would mean that any tree, which could not be proved to be individual private property, automatically vested in the State and the Forest Department would be justified in realising royalty from its extraction. This, however, has proved undesirable in NEFA on account of the very strong tribal feeling about land and forests for, as Dr Hutton said long ago:

'In Assam, Government has adopted the same attitude towards shifting cultivation that it did in the Central Provinces and denied any title to land not under permanent cultivation. This attitude, however, has rarely been enforced in practice in the hill districts. If the Assam Forest Regulations, under which tribal land used for jhum cultivation is treated as Unclassed State Forest, were to

be strictly enforced all over Anam, they would undoubtedly cause such widespread discontent and privation as to lead to open rebellion."

The whole concept of reservation in NEFA has been modified considerably by rules that existing villages falling within the proposed reserves should not be uprooted, but that sufficient land should be demarcated for their present needs as well as for their future expansion. The tribal people living in or near Reserve Forests also have the right to collect timber and minor forest produce for their customary personal use (but not for sale, barter or gift); to graze cattle; to hunt and fish freely; to collect orchids; and to keep skins, hides, tusks and horns of animals hunted in the Reserves as trophies.

The management of the third category of forests will now vest in the existing tribal councils which are recognised under the various Jhum Land Regulations. These powers will not be given immediately all over NEFA but, for the time being, only in the more advanced areas, where forest extraction has already begun or will begin soon, such as in the lower villages of Simgi, the Roing area of the Dihang Valley, the Klumpli lowlands of Lohit and those parts of Tirap which are adjacent to the plains. The entire revenues from the forests under their control will be given to these councils, which will use them for the development of their villages.

This new arrangement will place much greater responsibility on the councils and will thus strengthen them. As they come to realise that they are managing their own forests they will take more care of them, for nothing creates a stronger sense of responsibility than the possession and control of money.

This policy, by giving greater authority and dignity to the tribal councils, extending their own control over the forests, and relieving them of anxiety as to the intentions of Government, is an important contribution to the implementation of the 'philosophy of NEFA'.

### *Hunting and Fishing*

Freedom to hunt and fish is of the first importance; the loss of this freedom has been a major cause of tribal decline in other parts of India. In the old days in the Central Provinces, Forest Officers



collected and burnt the bees and arrows of the Gonds and Baigas. At the same time, officials and other outsiders were freely allowed to shoot the animals which the people considered to be their's.

In NEFA, there are two considerations which we must keep in mind. The first is that, except in certain unpopulated areas, the wild life is in danger of being completely exterminated. There are great tracts of country where it is difficult to hear even the song of a bird. Unless, therefore, something is done quickly to protect this wild life, it will disappear altogether within a few years, which will not only be bad in itself, but will be a serious loss to the people who have always depended on hunting and fishing to supplement their diet with badly-needed food values.

Secondly, we must remember that the entire tribal area is divided into what we may call zones of influence; every tribe, every village has forests and streams over which it claims hunting and fishing rights, and there have been serious disputes and even wars as a result of their infringement. Certain clans have exclusive rights over the mountains where the mink-deer live in Lohit; all the high ranges in northern Sang are under the control of individual villages or tribal groups. The Shimongis, for example, will not allow the Khambis of the Yang Sang Chu Valley to visit the sacred mountain Ratala even on pilgrimage, for fear that they will disturb the game.

Then, all over tribal India, hunting and fishing is something more than a search for food: it is a religious activity involving strict taboos; on the success or failure of a ceremonial hunt will depend the success or failure of the harvest; the horns of an animal, the bones of a big fish, are hung up in the hunter's house, and it is taboo to desecrate them; before and after a hunt, offerings are made to the forest gods.

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the people should resent the incursion of outsiders to take the animals and fish which they regard as their own and which are bound to them by mythological and religious ties. In the old days, when there were only a few officers, the fact that a Political Officer went round with his gun caused no difficulties and indeed the people appreciated the excitement of an 'official' hunt; the older officers too were careful to divide any game with the local villagers.



But with no increase in staff, it may well happen that too many officers will want to hunt and fish and what is a necessity for the tribal folk will be sacrificed for what is after all a luxury for them. For this reason the Political Officers have been asked to be very careful in issuing shooting licences and all members of the staff have been asked to reduce their shooting and fishing to a minimum.



Tamga with cross-bow

Tribal people everywhere are justiculously careful about the division of meat and fish, and at feasts and festivals, after a successful hunt, it is distributed according to certain traditional rules. When, on the rare occasions that an officer does go hunting and is successful, it would, therefore, be a courteous and appropriate gesture for him to hand over a good proportion of the game (in my opinion it should be at least half) to the tribesmen in whose forests he has hunted.

It may be possible gradually to educate the people to observe close seasons for certain types of animal, to kill animals for sacrifice in a more merciful manner and to give up the practice of fishing by poison. But in this great caution is needed, for any suspicion of interference with hunting and fishing rights will be resented. Once, when I discussed this with some Mishmi elders, they declared that it was not our business to improve the lot of animals, but to look after human beings!

### *The Future of Tribal Land*

The Administration's present policy indicates its concern to protect tribal interests. But it must be remembered that arrangements of this kind are temporary; they might be reversed in future years, and a less generous policy in the future might have all the more serious repercussions just because of today's liberality.

The people of NEPA cannot be spoon-fed and coddled for ever. If they are to be strong, they must emerge one day from their seclusion and battle on equal terms with the outside world. Before this happens it is essential that they should be provided with clear titles to their lands and forests, so that even though the protecting hand of the present Administration may be withdrawn, they will be comparatively secure.

Some of the tribes who later suffered the worst exploitation from outsiders were, at the beginning, in a position not unlike that of our NEPA tribes today. They were protected by their seclusion, by their own intractability, by a measure of administrative benevolence. But time passed; communications were improved, the people themselves grew tame, the fostering care of Government was withdrawn. And because they had been insufficiently established in their ownership, they gradually lost much of their land and so fell into poverty and despair.

Some of the older British officials pleaded for the granting of greater proprietary or ownership rights over land to the tribesmen. Their voices were largely unheard—with tragic results. I believe that history will judge us primarily on two things: how we solve the problem of tribal culture, and how we deal with the problem of tribal land.

### *Communications*

The whole of NEPA, which until recently was appropriately described as the 'Hidden Land', has now been brought under administration and the Indian flag now flies at almost every point of entry into the country from the international border, where in the British days, there was a great expanse of unknown and unmapped tribal territory. There are many other centres for administration and development scattered among the formidable mountains or in the heart of primeval forests.

The difficulty is to get to them. There are outposts which are sixteen day's walk from their headquarters, and marches of ten or twelve days, not on foot but simply to get to their place of work, are accepted as a matter of routine by many of the NEFA officers. This not only wastes a lot of time and energy, but raises serious problems of portage: the carrying of loads diverts the local people from agriculture and cottage industries. The air-dropping operation which supplies the outposts with the necessities of life, is said to be the largest that has ever been undertaken, but it is expensive and, though the pilots show amazing enterprise and courage in flying over this exceptionally difficult terrain, the weather conditions of NEFA make their task hazardous and uncertain.

Already there are seven airfields and three light-plane strips in commission, which enable supplies to be lifted and serious cases of sickness to be evacuated. The most spectacular progress, however, has been made in the building of roads. The Army Engineers' access road to Banaŋ La which, at a height of 9,000 feet, is the capital of the Kamang Division, will, when complete, be one of the great roads of India, a marvel of engineering skill. A road now connects Ziro, at over 5,000 feet on the Apsa Tani plateau, with the plains. Paigŋon now has both road and air connections with the rest of India. In Tirap, a road, largely constructed by tribal enterprise, now links its headquarters with Margherita. Apart from regular roads with their modern bridges, an impressive network of bridle-paths and foot-tracks now covers large portions of the interior. Many inter-village roads have been constructed by the villagers on their own initiative.

An important aspect of the road and building programme has been the adaptation of the CPWD procedures to tribal conditions. A revised and liberalized scheme, based on the strongly corporate sense of the people, has been adopted, which eliminates the individual contractor, works through the tribal councils, and allows tasks to whole villages which divide the rewards of their labour.

All this, in the first instance, is of advantage to the Administration, but for the NEFA people themselves it has important implications. For them roads, paths, bridges mean that in the time era of peace they will be able to get about; fresh possibilities of trade will open to them; in times of scarcity they will get



supplies more quickly; through the roads they will become more closely linked with the rest of India and will get to know it better. And in particular good bridges over the rivers will mean a great expansion of inter-village unity in the interior; hitherto villages on opposite banks of an unfordable river have had little to do with one another—and when we don't know someone we tend to scorn or dislike him.



Assamese bridge

Communications will probably even assist in solving the language problem, for as the people are able to move about more freely they may evolve a sort of NEFA Esperanto, and the multiplicity of dialects, which grew up largely as a result of the difficulty of communications, will merge into the great fundamental languages and most of the people will be able to understand each other.

Roads, of course, can be a curse as well as a blessing to the tribal people. In some places they have been the means of corruption and exploitation. They have brought new diseases, moral decline and cultural decadence. They have made it easy

for the money-lender, the rapacious merchant, the liquor-vendor, the lawyer's host to penetrate deep into the hills and forest. They can bring money in, but they can also take money out. They have helped to destroy the hand-loom industry by the import of cheap machine cloth; they have brought vulgar and inferior goods to the very doors of the people. The Administration is trying to see that this does not happen in NEFA and to ensure that every road is a pilgrim's way to a better and richer life, bringing health, food and enlightenment to the villages it serves.

### *Self-sufficiency in Food*

Originally, says Pierre de Schlippe the acronotrist, in a significant study of 'glaming' in Africa, 'every human group has built its culture "from the ground up". Food production is its foundation. Agriculture is one of the main links between a human group and the landscape in which it lives and which it exploits. Through agriculture every environment has taught its inhabitants a certain way of life. The teacher of a culture is its environment, and agriculture is its classroom. The more refined functions of a culture, laws and customs, social and political organisations, morals and beliefs, are in a sense the superstructure on the foundation of agriculture.'

As in Africa, so in NEFA, this superstructure is exposed to a much more insistent process of acculturation than its foundation, and it is only later that the process reaches the cultivator, 'the last, the most conservative social layer'. By this time one of the following things may have happened. 'A compromise between the old and new cultures may have been reached, and this compromise may have inherited from the former its harmonious relation to the environment. Food production remains secure and the group can survive. Or else the new culture has proved unable to adapt itself to the environment. Then it is either shaken off, or if it is too strong for this, it persists and leads the group to extinction.'

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the penetration of modern civilisation into the wet tropics of Africa, which is divided into 'innumerable small ecological problem areas, in each of which man lives in the greatest possible dependence on environment.' This may also be illustrated in NEFA, where there could



be no greater contrast than between the north of Sabarni, where man fights a losing battle against the giant forces of nature, and the Apo Tini plateau where a kindly environment has been subdued by centuries of tribal genius.

African shifting cultivators are still at a subsistence level, where each family must produce what it wants to consume. "They have been induced, it is true, to produce a little more, and this surplus production is at present fulfilling the demand of feeding towns and industries. But in exchange for this surplus production they get money with which they can buy only consumer goods, which are surplus luxury and no more. Here the economic circuit is broken. The money-income of the African cultivator is not converted into better means of production. The productive capacity of the country remains virtually the same.

'And if the question is asked why modern civilization has failed to improve African agriculture, the answer must be that it has so far proved incompatible with the environment of the wet tropics. When civilization began to penetrate to the contact zone between man and his habitat, when it became necessary to drive agriculture into the orbit of general increased efficiency, the environment emphatically imposed its veto.'

Mr de Schillepe regards this as the crucial problem of Africa, before which all other problems assume minor importance. 'We must awake and face our duty. We must find ways of adapting modern agriculture to the environment of the wet tropics.' If only, he insists, 'we could interpret a traditional practice in terms of its environment and traditional limitations, we could certainly find the way to its improvement. If only we could bring ourselves to think in terms of the local environment instead of in terms of our upbringing, we could certainly bridge the gap.'

In NEFA too the greatest problem facing the Agricultural Department is the hard, strange, hostile environment, with its heavy rainfall and steep hillsides and, as I will show, it is trying to adapt its thinking and practice to it.

Any plan for the improvement of agriculture, especially in NEFA where the first task is to bring the cultivator up to the subsistence level, must take account of his food habits, for there is not much point in introducing crops which he is not going to eat.



The basic diet, consisting mainly of cereals, millers, vegetables and meat, is much the same everywhere. In places where wet rice cultivation has been introduced, rice has naturally become



Padam girls husking rice

the staple food, but Job's tears and millet are more commonly grown on the shams. The people cultivate maize, partly for use as pig-feed, sweet potatoes, chillies and onions, the mustard-leaf

Drumsticks and colocasia; in recent years they have taken to ordinary potatoes, which have a great future among them in view of their liking for every kind of legume.

They are also fond of pumpkins, brinjals, ginger, onions, the flowers of the plumbago, mushrooms and use a very large variety of wild leafy vegetables, coots, tubers and fruits to supplement the cultivated crops. A favourite dish is made from young bamboo shoots, which are pounded up and stored in bamboo tubes until they ferment.



A mithun

They have little in the way of sweets. They collect honey, though they have shown a curious lack of interest in bee-keeping. In northern Slang the cultivation of sugar-cane is very old and the Aolis there recognise three varieties; the Administration has now introduced this in many places and is taking up the question of producing gin.

Although milk is popular among the Buddhist tribes, who make it into butter and ghee, it is tabooed by the majority of the people who in this resemble their tribal brethren in Africa and other parts of the world. If a mother cannot feed her baby, she will give him rice softened in beer. Attempts, however, have now been made to introduce milk, especially in the schools, and many tribal employees take it in their tea, which seems the happiest way of getting used to it.

The people of NEFA are almost omnivorous in meat and fish. They enjoy the flesh of deer, squirrels, the wild bear, and the birds and cats which they catch in their traps; some tribes regard dog's flesh and elephant or monkey meat as special delicacies. They usually reserve their domestic animals, such as mithuns, pigs,

cattle, goats and chickens for special occasions of sacrifice or feasting, and put eggs also to an important ritual use.

They eat certain kinds of snake, frogs and even beetles and lugs. In the Diliang Valley Expedition of 1912-13 a number of Naga porters developed alarming symptoms of general paralysis. It was discovered that this was due to their eating poisonous lugs which they had found under rocks in the bed of a river and which were later identified as belonging to the family Pentatomidae. Fortunately, they recovered with suitable treatment after three days.

Both meat and fish are often dried and there are special racks for the purpose above the hearths in every house. One reason for this is that the meat or fish supply commonly comes all at once in large quantities. Hunting and fishing is often a communal enterprise undertaken by the whole village and it is impossible to eat the whole of the catch at one time. So too when a mithun is killed, even though many people share in the feast, there is sufficient left over to be dehydrated and kept against a period of scarcity.

There are, as in all parts of the tribal world, special taboos adopted by different tribes and clans. The Wanchoos avoid a certain kind of fish which is supposed to be the reincarnation of a human being. The Idu Mishons avoid the langur monkey and the tiger, with which they have totemistic relationships. They also forbid their women to take any kind of meat, (except small birds, fish and wild rats), which might make them barren. The Buddhist tribes generally do not take beef, pork, mutton and chicken, though they eat the flesh of most wild animals. The Lamas take fish and venison, provided the killing has been done by someone else. The more orthodox Sherdukpens will not even eat eggs.

Most food is boiled, though meat may also be roasted and maize parched in a pan; rice or millet is boiled with vegetables and flavoured with chillies and salt. The grains are not washed beforehand, the water is not thrown away and the bamboo tube or pot is carefully closed with leaves, a method of cooking which helps to retain Vitamin B in the food. A porridge of rice or millet flour and a kind of rice-bread is popular. Rice or millet are pounded into powder, mixed with hot water into a paste,



spread on one leaf and covered with another and then baked on the fire. It is eaten with salt and chillies, simple chutneys, vegetables, meat or fish.

The people only rarely use oil or ghee in cooking, though they are gradually becoming popular.

The Department of Anthropology has made a dietary survey in the Siang Division which has shown that the Adi's food is richer in many respects than that of the average Indian peasant. It is said to contain 16 per cent more calories, 17 per cent more protein, 70 per cent more calcium and 33 per cent more Vitamin A. This is largely due to the rice-beer which supplements the ordinary food and is rich in protein and minerals. In spite of this, however, Dr P. N. Sen Gupta has pointed out that the diet has a number of defects. 'For instance, the calory intake is not in accordance with the climate, body-size and work; animal protein of high biological value is inadequate; because of the practice of smoking and drying meat, a considerable amount of useful protein is lost; and calcium is mainly supplied by the green leafy vegetables, the maximum value of which may not be derived by the system.' He adds that the very hard-working Adi women do not receive nearly enough energy-foods and many become inactive in their forties.

But the main drawback of the diet is that there is not enough of it. For several months in the year, no cereals are available. The wild game which was such an important supplement to the diet in former days is in danger of extinction. Although the Administration is introducing better breeds of domestic fowls, pigs and cattle, and has made a start on a scheme for fisheries, it will take time to make up the deficiency. There is the further danger that just when new forms of animal food are becoming available, the very people who introduce them may bring in new tubercles. Provided, however, that the NEFA staff really appreciates the fundamental policy of the Administration, we may hope that in time the new domestic animals now being introduced will take the place of the wild game that is disappearing.

The people of NEFA nearly all practice jhumming, the only practical method of cultivation on the steep slopes of hills, which is closely linked with social custom, mythology and religion.

In jhumming the people cut the trees and plants on the hill-sides



Apa Tauri at work in their fields





# Summer

May

1958

June

SUN	4	11	18	25	SUN	1	8	15	22	29
MON	5	12	19	26	MON	2	9	16	23	30
TUE	6	13	20	27	TUE	3	10	17	24	
WED	7	14	21	28	WED	4	11	18	25	
THU	1	8	15	22	29	THU	5	12	19	26
FRI	2	9	16	23	30	FRI	6	13	20	27
SAT	3	10	17	24	31	SAT	7	14	21	28

NORTH-EAST FRONTIER AGENCY

Calendars depicting tribal scenes can be of great value. This illustrates a Haila and cultivation on the Apa Taro plateau.



during the dry season, and burn them, along with the organic deposits accumulated through many years of leaf-fall, before the rain set in. In NEFA they do not plough the ground or usually use frecklebars, but dibble in the seed and, in some places, surround every individual shoot with a little fence of leaf and bamboo. They use a jhum-clearing for two years and then abandon it to allow the natural recuperation of soil-fertility, returning to it after a period of years, which varies according to the pressure of population and availability of land. Provided the jhum-cycle is sufficiently long, the soil has time to rebuild its nutrients, and even very old clearings produce good harvests. The real problem that arises when an increase of population necessitates a shortening of the jhum-cycle and the use of land lacking in essential fertilizers.

Jhumming has always been a matter of controversy. Everyone agrees that it is destructive of the forest, causing the bigger trees to yield to a low vegetal cover of bamboos, grasses and shrubs. It is extravagant in that it rapidly squanders the fertility stored in the soil by years of leaf-fall. It is wasteful of time and energy, as the task of cutting the trees is arduous. It has also been argued that it causes rapid erosion of the soil. On the other hand, even forestry experts have questioned whether the damage done to the forest is as serious as it sometimes appeared. As long ago as 1909, A. P. Percival, a Forest Officer of the Central Provinces, declared that in his opinion 'the importance of the whole matter had been exaggerated', that in time the forest recovered, and that in areas where there was no possibility of exploiting the timber commercially, shifting cultivation caused less harm to the forest than its prohibition would cause to the forest people. Sir Bampfylde Fuller wrote at the end of the last century that he was 'under the impression that in the past rather exaggerated ideas had been entertained of the injurious effects of shifting cultivation, especially in a country of heavy rainfall, where its effects seem often to be not the permanent denudation of the land, but the substitution of one kind of forest growth for another.'

It is sometimes said that the floods which from time to time devastate the plains of Assam are due to the practice of jhumming in the NEFA hills. But this cannot be so, for the conditions of rainfall, humidity and temperature in the jhummed areas of NEFA

are so favourable that no clearing remains without a vegetal cover for any length of time. Immediately after any area goes fallow at the close of the cropping period, it is covered with some kind of vegetation which checks erosion and the run-off of rain-water. Moreover, the area under cropping at any one time is estimated at only 3 to 4 per cent of the total area of the Agency. It is the loss of soil fertility, rather than the danger of erosion and leaching, which is the real problem.

In 1933 Mr M. D. Chaturvedi, who was then Inspector General of Forests to the Government of India, made an investigation of forestry problems in Assam and came to the conclusion that 'the notion widely held that shifting cultivation is responsible in the main for large-scale soil erosion needs to be effectively dispelled.' He declared in a weighty passage:

'The correct approach to the problem of shifting cultivation lies in accepting it not as a necessary evil, but recognizing it as a way of life; not condemning it as an evil practice, but regarding it as an agricultural practice evolved as a reflex to the physiographical character of the land. For too long, shifting has been condemned out of hand as a curse to be ashamed of, a vandalism to be decried. This attitude engenders an inferiority complex and an unhealthy atmosphere for the launching of any development scheme seeking to improve the current practice.'

This opinion, from an eminent forestry expert, represents the attitude of the NEFA Administration to the problems of improved agriculture. It is trying to solve them in three ways. The first is by the introduction of wet rice cultivation in all areas, though these are comparatively few, where it is possible. There are, however, a few broad valleys such as the valley of the Sittoung River in the Sung Division and in the foothills, where it can be introduced and, since Independence, about 20,000 acres of land have been developed. The increased yield from these fields will make possible a longer cycle of the plums, essential if they are to regain their fertility. A second way of improving cultivation in mountainous areas is to introduce terracing on the more gentle slopes of hills. This has been done by the tribesmen themselves with singular success in the Sacra Hills of Orissa, by the Angamis and Semas in the Naga Hills, and by the Monpas of Khamti. It will, however, take time to persuade the essentially conservative people of NEFA to take to terracing on any large scale.



There remains the possibility of developing jhuming on a scientific basis which will limit its disadvantages and promote the fertility of the soil. A number of different methods have been suggested at various times. For example, in the French and Belgian Ardennes there is a type of shifting cultivation, there called *marcage*, in the oak coppice forests which are grown to produce bark for tanning and small poles. Here the greatest care is taken to preserve the vitality of the stools by cutting them so that they will pollard readily, and not spreading over them any of the stuff to be harked. When the crop is weeded or harvested all damage to the shoots that come up from the stools is carefully avoided, so that after the cropping is over, they quickly shoot out branches and leaves and cover the soil, thus protecting it until the next clearing is due.

Taungia cultivation, which originated in Burma and has proved successful in parts of West Africa as well as in the Garo and the Mikir Hills of Assam, is a method of transforming jhum into regular forest. The cultivator is induced to plant seedlings in his clearing when he has done with it, thus creating a plantation at very small cost. But this does not improve jhum cultivation but brings it to an end, and can only be practiced where there is alternative land available. The cultivation of rubber, cashewnut, coffee, cardamom and black pepper in the jhum, though desirable where they are to be abandoned altogether and marketing facilities exist, is also not part of the programme to improve jhuming, for its aim is the substitution of a permanent cash-crop for it.

Some of the tribes have an old tradition of contour-bunding to prevent erosion, for which they use the larger trunks and branches of trees felled in the jhum, and this custom has been encouraged, and introduced where it has not been known.

Scientific jhuming will have two primary aims—to maintain the fertility of the soil and to check erosion. To achieve these, suitable crops will have to be sown in the jhum after the harvest has been gathered in the second year. The wattle *Azadirachta indica* has been suggested as ideal for this purpose. It is easy to raise, quick-growing, fixes nitrogen in the soil, and its bark is of commercial importance, for it has a high tannin content needed by India which imports large quantities of wattle tan-bark from Africa. Unfortunately its extraordinary power of reproduction



by root-suckers, which would make it valuable for cloaking the unstable hill-slopes above the NEFA roads so subject to landslides, renders it unsuitable for jhum in which the cultivators will be returning, for it can only be eradicated by deep hoeing which would disturb the ground and actually encourage erosion.



Mishna woman working in a jhum

Mr. M. S. Sivaraman, who has made suggestions of great importance for the improvement of jhuming, has proposed that perennial or pigeon-pea (*Cajanus indicus*) grain may be siddled along the contours of slopes, either in the third year when the jhum is left fallow, or even along with rice and millet, for the plants will grow up later and, provided they have been sown thinly, will not interfere with the other crops. The last-growing

leguminous creeper, *Calopogonium*, may be sown shortly afterwards; this quickly forms a thick matted growth over the entire soil. Long-duration cowpeas or perennial leguminous shrubs such as *Tephrosia candida* or *Crotalaria anagyroides* can also be tried. They will grow up to 4,000 feet and above this elevation there should be research to find local legumes that will take their place. These will not only fix nitrogen in the soil but will prevent soil erosion and suppress the weeds; the leaves of the grain or pea plants are good fertilizers, and the plants themselves can be cut later for fuel.

A crop which has proved successful in Africa is the South American cassava or manioc (tapioca) which produces large storage roots rich in starch, the nutritional value of which can be greatly enhanced by proper methods of preparation. Cassava and non-climbing yams are sown in the African clearings in the second year of cultivation after the ordinary crop has been reaped, and are left to grow by themselves; since they can be harvested at any time from one to three years later, they serve as a valuable food reserve. It might be possible to introduce this in NEFA and similar areas, and build up a reserve of food material with the cassava and yams that are already known in Assam, as well as with local varieties of tubers which grow wild in the forest and even now are a source of food for the population during the lean months of the year. These crops might well be grown in the farms during the fallow period.

Even where a village has adopted permanent cultivation, it is important to allow it to do a certain amount of jhuming in order to grow vegetables and gourds. The ideal, in fact, is to allow both permanent and shifting cultivation to continue side by side.

The NEFA agriculturalists are now preparing to demonstrate the new methods on what are called 'half-plots'. On one side of a hill is a control plot, where the usual method of jhuming is followed; beside it is another plot where new techniques are tried and new seeds and tools are used. Experiments will be made in techniques to add organic matter to fertilize the soil, prevent erosion, discover the most effective crop rotation, and evolve a simple way of adding humus other than by forest fallow.

There are, however, many problems, and every solution has its corresponding complexity. Contour-bunding, valuable as it is,



encourages wild rats which attack the crop. Waste gives nitrogen and tan bark, but is difficult to eradicate. Improved implements may break up more soil and this cause more erosion than the simple dibbling-sticks of old. The food habits of the people (and all over the world food habits are very hard to change) have to be considered: the NEPA tribes, for example, take very little in the way of pulses, but they are fond of roots, and the legumes are thus more likely to succeed than the grains. Before re-sowing an abandoned *jhum*, ceremonies might have to be performed which the people might regard as a financial burden that they could not afford.

The introduction of wet rice cultivation also raises its own problems. In the foothills of Lohit, it has been successfully introduced in a number of villages, and the people are delighted with the bigger crops they raise—but wild elephants, which never damaged the *jhums*, devastate the level fields. In Padohat the switch-over to concentrated rice-production has not everywhere given the people more to eat: they are much prosperous, certainly, but they sell their rice and the neglect of the *jhums* has meant a loss of the gourds and vegetables they formerly got from them. In Orissa the Saoras used to complain that, although they obtained better harvests in the regularly cultivated fields, these were exposed to exploitation by outsiders who were not interested in their *jhums*. In parts of Tripura there is a strict taboo on using any land which has been struck by lightning. This did not matter when a *jhum* was struck, for the owner in any case would be leaving it before long, but there have been several cases where a cultivator, after clearing and preparing a field for wet rice with great labour, has had to abandon it as a result of the lightning taboo.

Another serious problem concerns possible changes in the tribal idea of land tenure. As we have seen, the system of *jhum* cultivation provides an excellent foundation for the co-operative communal farming towards which many parts of the world are moving. The introduction of permanent cultivation, however, is turning the minds of the people more and more to the idea of private ownership. We should be on our guard that the new individualism does not lead ultimately to fragmentation and litigation about land. It might be possible to develop wet rice



cultivation and terracing on a communal basis through the tribal councils.

For the improvement of agriculture in an area like NEFA, therefore, research in agronomy and sociology must go hand in hand; the value of this is illustrated in Pierre de Schlippe's book, *Shifting Cultivation in Africa*; from which I have already quoted. The important thing is to recognize that tribal agriculture is both a way of life and an aspect of culture, for culture has been defined (in one of its aspects) as the force of adhesion between the people and their environment. 'It seems to me,' says Mr de Schlippe, 'of the greatest importance to acknowledge that a system of agriculture of a human group is an important although inter-dependent part of the whole culture of the group', and has the vital function of insuring its survival in its natural home.

If this is accepted, as I think it must be, coercion by legislation or the mere introduction of isolated elements of progress will not take us very far. The essential thing is education in the widest possible sense, which is synonymous with guided social change or guided social adaptation. This is by no means easy, partly because it is difficult to persuade workers in the field to recognize agriculture as a cultural concept at all and partly because of the differences in environment from area to area. 'In every case social and agricultural research will have to precede community education in order to explore the existing level of the agricultural system.'

Above all our attitude and policy must be vigorously positive. Mr de Schlippe's warning about what has happened or may happen in Africa, should be borne in mind by all who want to 'reform' tribal agriculture by prohibiting its traditional methods.

'Half a century ago leaders, amongst whom Lord Lugard was most prominent, launched a warning that the breaking down of local political systems, of local law and morals, however primitive, unjust and immoral they may seem, is fraught with the danger of creating a moral vacuum and political chaos. The first result of this warning was to reinstate the existing levels of the political system under the slogan of indirect rule and to study them. The next step was to start modernizing African political systems by a slow and patient process of education.

The same warning must now be sounded most vigorously concerning agricultural systems. There can be no doubt that the

present attitude, of either respecting unguided adaptation to new economic conditions introduced by the civilized minority or of piecemeal legislation: it breaking down the traditional agricultural systems without offering any better system in their place. If it is admitted that agriculture is that part of culture which is the main force of adhesion of a group to its environment, then this breakdown has within itself the seeds of a disruption which may well spell the doom of many an African tribe.

The NEPA attitude to shifting cultivation shows that we have always had this in mind, and illustrates, in fact, the 'Middle Way' we are trying to follow. One way of dealing with the problem is to forbid jhumming altogether—this is an undue interference in the life of the people and causes psychological and material impoverishment. Another way, followed in the past, was to permit it without check. This too was wrong, for we have seen that there are various ways whereby jhumming can be improved and the damage to the forests alleviated.

The NEPA Administration is attempting a far-reaching agricultural reform—*but from within*. It does not forbid jhumming or speak of it as an 'evil', but it is teaching improved techniques within the traditional framework. At the same time it is introducing new methods of terracing and irrigation; it is encouraging vegetable gardens and growing of fruit trees; it is distributing new labour-saving implements and better seed. It recognizes that acculturation in other aspects of tribal life must be accompanied by a parallel change in the most fundamental culture of all, agriculture.

If it succeeds, it will prove that modern science can assist tribal economy without destroying it.

### *Health*

NEPA offers a unique challenge and unparalleled opportunities of experience and service to the doctors of India. It will not perhaps offer them very much money; for some years to come, they will have to work under conditions of discomfort and loneliness; they have to make long journeys on foot; they have to break down century-old prejudice and suspicion. But for them there is all the thrill and adventure of being pioneers of modern science, the privilege of extending the healing, friendly hand of modern India to her remotest borders.

Professionally too there are difficult and urgent problems. In some areas the population is decreasing alarmingly; medical science can tell us why and suggest a remedy. There is the problem of endemic goitre with its complications of cretinism and deaf-mutism. There is a form of endemic syphilis, possibly yaws



Mask representing a woman  
with exophthalmic goitre

and not venereally transmitted, which has features of great interest. There is rather a lot of leprosy and there are three H. D. Sanatoria run on lines specially adapted to tribal conditions. In some of the lonely valleys of northern Subansiri, the entire population is affected by a distressing and disfiguring skin-disease, *tinea imbricata*, for which it has taken years to find a remedy. The discovery of the vector species of mosquito at the end of 1955 marked an important step forward in the battle against malaria.



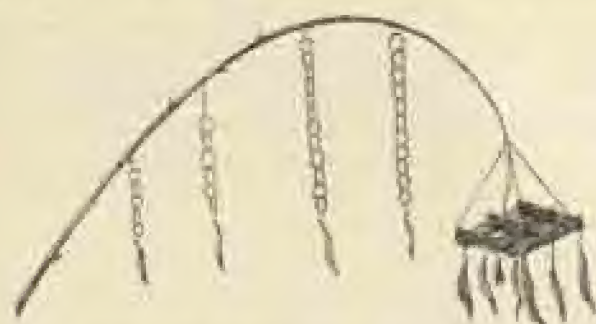
The lack of medical facilities in the past has meant that there have been hundreds, thousands, of unrecorded tragedies, the sick living out their days in pain and misery, unprotected in their little huts. I think of the children with sore and inflamed eyes, their little limbs distorted by rickets, their stomachs grossly swollen with enlarged spleens. I have seen many people shockingly disfigured by untreated burns. In one village on the Upper Siang, I found an old woman with only one arm. Some time before the other had been bitten by a snake and had, as they put it, 'rotted away'. She had begged her husband and friends to cut it off, but they were afraid. Finally, after weeks of agony, the arm broke off at the joint and did recover. In another village there was an Adi man who had his leg bitten by a bear and suffered in the same way. The wound seems to have become gangrenous, the leg swelled monstrously and at last it too broke off at the joint.

Think of the incredible suffering that these two people must have endured; consider too the invincible will-to-live and the physical strength which enabled them to survive such ordeals.

I was particularly moved by the Adi man. I met him first clanking up a steep and narrow track; he was going along on his one leg, entirely alone, carrying his things, somehow getting across the suspension bridges and up and down the tremendous hills. I saw him again fifteen miles further on—and every time we met there was a beaming smile, never a complaint, and never a hint of begging for anything. Here was the true Adi spirit—proud, independent, courageous, filled with a zest for life. These people deserve the very best that medical science can give them.

Before Independence medical relief was available only in a few official centres, though doctors accompanied expeditions into the interior. Even up to 1955, only curative medical services were provided. During the next five years, curative and preventive services worked independently. But since 1956, the two services have been integrated, and the former Chief Medical Officer has become the Director of Health Services, a change that has meant something very much more than a mere difference in words. In 1947-48 there were only fifteen hospitals and dispensaries in the entire area (including Tuensang), whereas today there are no fewer than seventy Health Units, which combine the functions of hospitals, dispensaries and mobile teams.

Tuberculosis is a serious danger in some areas, and a B. C. G. campaign was started last year and a central T. B. Hospital will shortly be opened. In line with the Administration's policy of training up local boys and girls to take over their own affairs, a



Charu, hung before a house after a sacrifice  
to avert disease.

Health Training Centre has been established at Panigbat. Here there are training courses for serving doctors, for newly-recruited medical officers (who have to be oriented to a way of life so alien to anything in their previous experience), and for under-matriculate NEPA tribal boys and girls, designed to make them health-workers and nurses.

An essential aspect of the campaign for health is the improvement of the water-supply, a matter in which the tribesmen themselves have shown the greatest interest. The aim is to have a good clean water-point in every village, for this is one of the most urgent needs for a people who in many cases prefer to locate their villages on the tops of hills, far away from a stream. Lack of water means dirt, disease and waste of time. If the energy spent in climbing laboriously up and down the hills to a water-point could be used for weaving or some other gainful employment, it would clearly be a great advantage.

In all the health work of NEPA the personal equation is of paramount importance. Some of the people make long journeys to the plains to take their troubles to Mission Hospitals, not out of any attachment to Mission religion, but because, so they say, they are treated with love, consideration and efficiency. Every



patient who prefers a Mission Hospital to one of our's is a challenge and a reproach.

In my experience—and I have visited many dispensaries in the far interior—every doctor who takes the right approach and identifies himself with the tribes is a success. But a doctor who goes merely for a job (and of course this applies to every member of the staff), does not bother to learn a language, spends his time grumbling about his pay and lack of facilities and amenities, who does not, in short, love his patients and give himself to them in a spirit of sacrifice and devotion, is a failure.

Such failures are few, and the doctors who have identified themselves with the tribal people have brought happiness both to them and to themselves.

### *Self-sufficiency in Cloth*

To achieve self-sufficiency in cloth is another matter of high priority. We may remember that throughout his life Mahatma Gandhi placed khadi in the forefront of his programme: to Jawaharlal Nehru it was 'the livery of our freedom'. In NEPA, although there are a few tribes which have never had the art of weaving, and others which have lost it in face of bazaar competition, handlooms are widely distributed over most of the area. But there is a great difference from other parts of India, where much of the weaving is in the hands of men; here it is the exclusive monopoly of women. The loom too are simpler and smaller than elsewhere: the women nearly all use the single-heddle union or loin-loom of a pattern common in Indonesia, which has a warp of some six yards by eighteen inches. There is no reed; a wooden sword is used to beat up the weft; and the actual weaving is done with a lambop-tube throw-shuttle. The Khamptis have a slightly larger loom, though of the same general pattern, and a few Assamese forms are now used in the administrative centres. The ordinary fly-shuttle loom, however, is unsuitable for use in the hill villages, for it cannot be accommodated in the houses; it is not portable—an important consideration in a part of the world where the women like to take their looms out into the sunshine when the weather is fine or carry them out into the fields to use when they have time; and it is difficult to preserve on it the texture or design of the loin-loom cloth.



The importance of weaving to the tribal mind is illustrated by the number of words there is for everything to do with it, even where the general vocabulary is small. Thus the Padams and Minyongs classify at least twelve different designs woven for the vertical strip that runs through the middle of a girl's galls-skirt. The Mishuns too have a large number of words for their various patterns and for all the processes of weaving.

Cotton is grown on a small scale in certain areas, as in the neighbourhood of Palghat and Roing, in parts of northern Siang and by the Daffas, but the bulk of the cotton yarn now used is imported from the plains. Wool comes from the north and from Tibet and is spun into yarn on hand-spinnles. Besides wool and cotton, some of the tribes use a bark-fibre extracted from the *Rhus nixa* nettle and other plants. The hair of the goat, dog and even monkey is sometimes used by the remoter tribes.



Wanchu girl at her loom

The hill women are very interested in colour and insist on getting the exact shades they prefer, though dependence on out-

side markets has inevitably modified their colour-schemes in recent years.

A number of natural dyes, however, are known—black, yellow, dark blue, green, brick red and madder, the dark blue being obtained from the *Strobilanthes flaccidifolius* plant, the madder from *Rubia altissima*, the yellow from the *Artocarpus* tree. These are generally fast and often give most attractive results.

To make NEPA self-sufficient in cloth is another 'material' aim which will have important psychological and even political results. The book *Hand-Spinning and Hand-Weaving* was written a long time ago, but the following passage is as relevant today as when it was first composed.

'The village craftsman and artisan is far more healthy and enjoys better surroundings than his brother, the mill worker. The smaller wage earned by him is more than compensated by the habit of contentment developed in cottage surroundings. The future of the country rests truly with the village artisan. He has to recharge the whole psychological atmosphere of his home with creative energy.

The handloom weaver will have to display his marvellous skill in work and design and find free vent for his individuality. There is great hope that this will come to be. The craftsman of the future years will naturally be fastidious in respect of material which he owns and on which he expends his labour and skill and the more so since he will be personally responsible for the quality of the finished product. Becoming a free agent in production he will enrich the national taste and safeguard it against decay. His hands being full of work, he will use his talent to best advantage. Not being cramped in body and soul he will make the citizen of the future and help in the rebuilding of the manhood of the nation.

'An industry with a new economic and cultural outlook will have been revived and then and not till then will the nation become the nursery of the beautiful, and cease to suffer from the twin diseases of "standardised minds and standardised commodities".'

The same attitude has been emphasised by Mr Nehru in a conversation with an English journalist, Mr John Strachey, which was reported in *The New Statesman*.

STRACHEY: To the student of your Second Five-Year Plan the most striking thing about it is that the plan purports development of two opposite kinds, as it were. On the one hand you



are beginning to build up the very latest types of large-scale modern industry—for instance I have just seen your new locomotive-building workshop at Chittaranjan, your fertilizer plant at Sindri and your 120-feet seam of open-cast coal at Bokaro. But then, on the other hand, and at the same time, you propose not only to preserve but actually to develop your cottage industry—you propose to extend the spinning and weaving of textiles by hand, on hand-spindles and handlooms. I realize that all this may be quite right and logical in Indian conditions, but it is certainly startling.

NEHRU: 'Yes, I know. But you must remember two things. First, hand-spinning and weaving—specially handloom weaving—is by no means dead in India. There are still many thousands of handlooms being worked in cottages throughout the country. We believe that this deep Indian tradition of handicrafts must not be allowed to die out. We believe that it can be developed most fruitfully. Then, again, the spinning and weaving of textiles by hand is an integral part of the whole nationalist tradition of which the Congress Party has been the leader and organizer. For instance, I am quite a good spinner. I used to like to use the hand-spindle; I found it an interesting and skilled occupation—splendid relaxation from mental activity.'

NEHRU: 'On the other hand, handloom weaving, rather than spinning, is the more promising process for our cottage industry development.'

STRACHY: 'What about the economies of the thing? Can the handloom possibly compete?'

NEHRU: 'Do not draw hasty conclusions about this. Remember that there may be great economies for the country as a whole in this cottage industry, and in particular in handloom weaving. There are economies in transport. Not only is the raw material often produced next door, in the same village where it is spun and woven, but also there are great social advantages in not herding millions of men and women into the great cities in order to mobilize them for large-scale machine industry. Think of the vast resources which India would have to put into city transport and other public services, if she were to develop all of her industries in the cities. Only a country which is planning its development on a socialist pattern can take into account these major social economies. For they do not affect the individual firm, since the individual firm does not have to pay for these developments of public utilities, city housing, and transport. But the country does have to pay for them—so there may be great advantages in cottage industries after all.'

The aim of the Administration is that there should be at least one loom in every NEFA home, and that the production of the



existing looms should be increased. I describe in a later chapter efforts that are being made to revive the artistic aspects of weaving. Here I will confine myself to the practical steps that are being taken.

The first task is to ensure a plentiful supply of raw materials. The Administration is being cautious about promoting the growing of cotton, for this should obviously wait until the area is self-sufficient in food. It has arranged for the import of cotton and wool, both raw and spun, on a large scale for sale in the co-operatives, emporia and shops. Yarn has been suggested as the most important of presents to be distributed by officers on tour, and it is given at prize on special occasions.

In the areas where weaving is only little known or has died out in the face of luxury competition, Mobile Units will tour from village to village, taking for not less than three months in each, in order to teach the use of the simple loom-loom. In some cases, officers' wives or the wives of tribal employees have done something to teach the art and encourage it. Weaving is in the blood of every NEFA girl and the response has been most encouraging.

In addition to this, there are weaving sections in several of the Cottage Industries Training and Production Centres (CHTC's), where girls come in as trainees and receive a regular stipend. In these weaving centres emphasis is laid on teaching improved techniques without changing the designs; there is scope for making the bin-loom, on which the finest cloth is prepared, more effective; the Anamese or Khampti loom is being introduced and a number of fly-shuttle looms are in use at the centres in order to increase production. Each centre will have a dyeing section attached to it, in which there will be some research into the tribal dyes which the girls will be encouraged to prepare and use.

In Kameng, the Monpas make carpets, mats and saddle-bags which attain a high degree of artistic beauty and technical skill. In Sung and parts of Lohit, the Adis make a serviceable cotton blanket. This craft is being encouraged by the supply of raw materials.

In many places it is unnecessary to teach weaving, since every woman and girl knows how to do it already. In such areas, as I shall describe presently, production units have been started, and have already proved their value.

For the sale and distribution of the NEFA textiles the Administration has laid down certain priorities. The first is that the lives of the people themselves should be enriched. The second is that local official needs should be met. And only thirdly, should the cloth be sold to the outside world.

Although in Lohit, for example, and parts of Siang and on the Apa Tani plateau, the people are not only self-sufficient for their own needs but are in a position to sell their textiles to neighbouring tribes, there are still a number of places where they cannot make enough cloth for their own use and, as a result, have to buy from the bazaar. Our aim, therefore, is to provide these deficit areas with cloth from the surplus areas. For example, the Nokes and Wanches of Tirap like to use a black coat which hitherto they have bought from the bazaar. Now we are arranging to supply them with such coats, hand-woven in Lohit and decorated with their own patterns. There is a great demand for Mishmi coats in Siang and they are stocked in the co-operatives there and sold to the Adi. The surplus of Lohit and Siang could also well travel up to northern Subanmi, where the people have no weaving tradition of their own and colourful bags, shawls and coats will be very acceptable.

There are plans to hold annual Melas, perhaps on Republic Day, when weavers and other craftsmen will be invited to bring their best products for sale. The Administration will try to arrange for persons skilled in art-appreciation to attend them and choose the best designs and most highly finished articles for special record and reward.

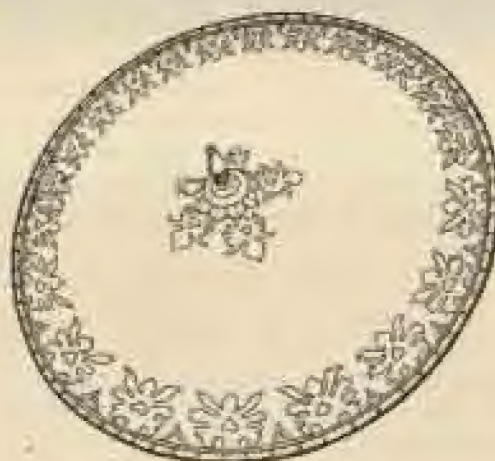
And then there is a constant demand from the Administration itself for the NEFA textiles. As I describe later, a large number of boys and girls have to be provided with hand-woven school uniforms in the tribal style. The emporia attached to the cultural centres in each Division have to be stocked with tribal goods for sale. Hand-woven bags, coats and shawls make most attractive 'people's presents' to be distributed on tour, and they are also very suitable as prizes in schools and on special occasions. Many officials and their wives are now using the NEFA fabrics as wearing apparel, as curtains, table-cloths or cushion-covers in their own homes, and as curtains in their offices. The locally-made blankets are to be used in school hostels and for in-patients

in the hospitals.

There is thus a very large local demand for the products of the tribal looms and it will be some time before sufficient can be produced for sale outside. At the same time this possibility is not being neglected and an emporium is being set up in Shillong for the sale of specialized articles, such as shawls, blouses, coats and neckties, as well as wood-carvings, pottery and cane-work.

### *The Development of Cottage Industries*

In a part of the world which has been forced to be so self-reliant as NEFA, it is only natural that many cottage industries should have developed over the course of the years. For example, Dalton, writing in 1872, describes how the Khampti priests 'in their hours of relaxation amuse themselves by carving in wood, bone or ivory, at which they are very expert. In making ivory handles of weapons they evince great skill, taste, and fecundity of invention, carving in high relief twisted snakes, dragons, and other monsters with a creditable unity and gracefulness of design.



A Khampti shield of woven bamboo;  
it is painted red and decorated in gold

'It is customary for the chiefs also to employ themselves in useful and ornamental arts. They work in gold, silver, and



iron, forge their own weapons and make their wives' jewels. They also manufacture embossed shields of buffalo or rhinoceros hide, gilding and lacquering them with skill and taste.

Throughout the area work in cane and bamboo reaches a high standard. Many tribesmen make their own hats which are often extremely decorative, adorned with the beaks and feathers of birds or with tufts of hair dyed red. They also make many kinds of basket, and cane-vessels, which are sometimes lined with raw cotton, are woven for carrying water. There is a wide variety of cane-belts, woven and plain, and in northern Subansiri there is even an elaborately woven brassiere of cane and fibre.

There are a number of tribal blacksmiths, but this craft which, as elsewhere, is regarded as spiritually dangerous and is fenced about with a number of taboos, is generally confined to certain families who go from village to village making and repairing tools as required. Itinerant Monpas and Monphas, for example, come down from the extreme northern border to do this. There is a traditional craft of casting in brass among the Adis, though it seems to have largely disappeared, but Daffas still make their own brass ornaments, dishes and sacred bells. There is some silver-work among the Sherdukpens and at one time, as Dalton noticed, the Khaptis were renowned for this art and still today some of the Mishmis and Khaptis carve in ivory.

Painting is unknown in NEFA except in western Kameng, where there are a number of artists who work in the traditional Buddhist style. They paint the walls and roofs of their religious institutions, sometimes very attractively, and decorate bowls, dishes, cups and masks made by the wood-carvers. In the same area there is some paper-making from local materials, though it is confined to only a few families of Monpas. The paper is of fair quality and is used by the literate Lamas for their correspondence and religious books.

Pottery is rare, partly because the clay is not suitable in most places and partly because in the past the people have been accustomed to use the very large and fine bamboos, that grow abundantly in their neighbourhood, for almost every purpose. They draw water in bamboo tubes, they cook in bamboo vessels and it is said that this is a good thing to do, for a certain amount of glucose is extracted in the process; they drink from bamboo mugs.

which are much healthier than the bamboo cups and mugs which are seldom washed; they use bamboo containers for storing rice-beer. All the same, there is a little pottery, though the wheel is not known. The Apo Taus have a tradition of making attractive clay models of animals which are used as toys. In northern Slang-ou Meridus and Khumbos make beautiful images of the Lord Buddha out of clay.



*Khumbos wood-carving of a temple dancer*

A rough and ready form of carpentry is practised by the Buddhist tribes who cut wood into planks with their axes, and are able to make fairly good doors, shelves and windows for their houses, as well as low seats and tables. The Wancho and Noctes show similar skill in the erection of their own buildings. The Adis, however, have very little interest in wood, all their attention being given to bamboo, and they neither carve in wood nor make

planks for the floors of their houses, though they do know how to make doors.

In addition to carpentry, some of the NEFA tribes have a tradition of wood-carving, most of which has a religious or magical basis. In Kamang bowls, cups and dishes are made; magnificent masks are carved for use in ceremonial dances, and Monpa artists make wooden images of the Lord Buddha. The Khambu and Memba of northern Simg carve wooden masks. In the Khampi area of Lohit there are wood-carvers who are adept in making beautiful religious images, figures of dancers and other objects. The chief centre of wood-carving, however, is in the Tuenang District and in the Wancho area of Tirup. Here the wood-carving in the past has been very largely associated with head-hunting and the human head dominates almost everything that is made. Thus there are tobacco pipes with the bowl carved in the shape of a head; drinking-cups with warriors carrying off heads in triumph; small wooden heads and little human figures, often done with astonishing realism and power, which again celebrate a successful raid. Some of the tribes make very good toys for children. It is obvious, now that head-hunting is coming to an end, that this art may not survive. But we hope that with proper guidance it will be possible to direct it into other channels. The carving of children's toys, for example, has great possibilities.

The making of ornaments is another craft which is not only worth while on the artistic side, but checks the drain of money to the bazaar. Every human being carries in his own body a canvas on which he can exercise his creative imagination. The tribal people, who are sometimes hampered by the lack of materials for their art, do at least have in their own charming persons an admirable field for self-expression. The ornaments made in the interior of the hills, where they have not been corrupted by cheap plastic articles from the towns, are ingenious and beautiful. Some tribes make pretty ornaments with the blue wings of birds and the green backs of beetles, or decorate their baskets with the stuffed bodies of brightly coloured birds. The Konyaks make a lovely flower-like ornament for the ears with red seeds and thin slices of bamboo. The Aka make bamboo handles and ear-ornaments which they decorate with delicate poker-work designs. All the tribes are very fond of beads and though some just hang



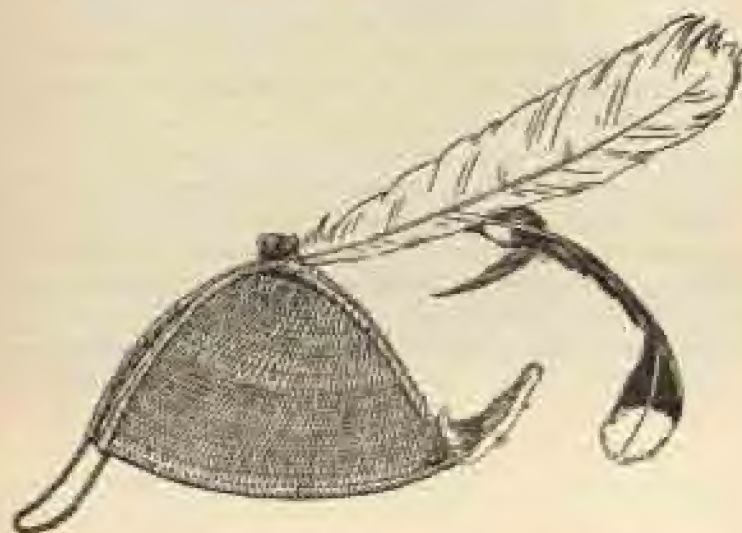
strings of them round their necks, others make them into attractive patterns. They also make every sort of head-band and a Konyak girl with her mood of gleaming brass or a Mishma girl with her crown of bright silver could go anywhere in the world and be admired.

Other minor arts are the poker work on cane pipes, 'sworils' for looms, cases for Jew's-harps made by the Akas, Tangans and Waichos; fans of cane or birds' feathers, wooden or clay dolls, ceramic belts, decorated shields.

To encourage these traditional industries, to revive them where they have died out, and to introduce new crafts, the Administration has established a number of Cottage Industries Training and Production Centres. The fundamental aim of these institutions is not to create new castes or guilds of craftsmen, but to enrich the life of the villagers by providing them with subsidiary occupations which they can follow in their spare time and to give them new techniques for the crafts they are already practising. In the case of boys trained as carpenters, however, there is so much official demand for furniture and house construction that every trainee has an opportunity of getting regular and full-time work. Similarly, the few tailors who are being trained are likely to take up this craft as a regular profession. The tribal blacksmiths too generally tend to concentrate on work in iron, though most of them also work in their fields. In the main, however, the crafts taught are intended to be supplementary to the main task of agriculture.

The teaching of work in cane and bamboo is perhaps of rather doubtful value. There is no particular point in importing into NEPA inexperienced youths from the plains to teach an art in which the tribal people are already expert. There is no need to spend Government money to teach students to do badly what they already do well. But there is one aspect of this craft which needs encouragement. The cane hats common in Sukumiri, Siang, parts of Lohit and Tirup are very attractive, but the art of making them is gradually disappearing. One of the reasons may be that some of these hats, which in the past were in the nature of crash-helmets to ward off the blows of enemies, are too heavy and cumbersome for an age of peace. Nowadays, however, they may well be made of lighter material, though there is no need to alter the

eventful design or rob them of their splendid decorations. There is scope also for introducing in the cane-work sections of the CHIPC the carving of bamboo roots which has produced such remarkable results in Tripura. In Tirap a number of good cane-chairs have been made of a type that fit comfortably into the tribal homes, and small stools or *maras* which are very useful to the people.



Hat worn by Apa-Tanis, Dalfu and Hilt Miris

It has not been easy to promote work in iron, partly because insufficient research has been done in the subject, but I believe that if blacksmith trainees were to be chosen from the families traditionally attached to this craft, and if certain ceremonies were to be performed at the appropriate times by the local priests in the smithies to ward off the spiritual dangers that always haunt the blacksmith, it would be possible to make better progress. There is now a scheme for inviting practising blacksmiths to come for comparatively short courses for the improvement of their technique.

There is considerable room for improvement of paper-making but it has not yet been possible to find young people willing to

come for training. The art of painting, however, is making good progress in the CITPC's at Tawang and Bonidi La, where the artists are given apprentices who accompany them when they go to paint the walls and roofs of religious institutions or official buildings.

Pottery has been introduced in Bonidi La and Ziro and may be taken up in Along.

The most important of the new crafts introduced to NEFA are carpentry and sawing. These are essential if the local houses are to be improved and are equally important for the fulfilment of the building programme of the Administration, for if there are no local carpenters to do the work craftsmen will have to be introduced from outside and they create many problems. In most of the Divisions, boys have come forward to learn this craft, the training course of which has recently been extended from one to two years. Every carpenter learns at the same time sufficient sawing to enable him to cut his own wood when he returns to his village.

The introduction of wood-carving, at separate from carpentry, in the CITPC's is most important. There is a danger that this art, in which some of the people excel, may die out—partly because in Tirap and Tuensang at least it was so closely associated with head-hunting. In Kameng, trainers are being taught to make



A children's toy from Tuensang



their own masks for pantomimes on the model of those carved at Tawang, and this will not only save themselves money and encourage a singular type of dancing but, once local needs have been supplied, will certainly find a ready market elsewhere. The same will be true of the toys, decorated beer-mugs, carved pipes and combs and other objects made in Tirap and Tinsang, the making of which we hope to revive.

But these things will have little or no sale unless they are genuine products of tribal creativeness.

For this reason, where wood-carving is being introduced, the Administration is engaging first-class wood-carvers from among the Monpas, Wanchoos, Khamptis, or whatever tribe may be able to produce them, and to teach the boys to carve in the traditional style. Otherwise, if a wood-carver is engaged from the plains, he is likely to do as much harm as good, for at that level I doubt if it will be possible to find anyone who will be humble enough to let the boys 'develop along the lines of their own genius'. In the Santal Parganas, I have noticed the disastrous effect of standardized urban wood-carving on the Santals, whose traditional carving is remarkable for its strength and originality. The new style is beautifully tidy with geometrical patterns and inspiringly symmetrical—but it is dead.

For the preservation and revival of such native arts as toy-making, poker-work on bamboo, carving in ivory, the making of ornaments, tribal experts will be employed from time to time to give short courses to all the trainees in a CITPC. None of these arts is sufficiently important to warrant a section to itself, but some of the boys and girls who are studying other crafts may well discover that they have an aptitude for them.

A number of other industries have been attempted at one time or another. Soap-making was taken up vigorously in the early days, but except in Bomali La did not prove successful. Bee-keeping has been attempted but has only succeeded in one or two places. It may be that to the tribal mind the extraction of honey is an adventure rather than a craft, for the people show courage and enterprise in storming the citadels of bees high up on the face of cliffs or at the tops of trees. All Gram Sevaks, however, are receiving some instruction in bee-keeping at their training centre in Paighat. Tailoring has been introduced in some centres and

is important wherever the people wear stitched clothes. Round Along and Paighat, for example, where the women are now wearing blouses and the men have coats, there is a strong demand for Adi tailors.



Aka shawl decorated with  
"poker-work" designs

Some of the NEFA tribesmen are very fond of the Assamese silk-cloth, which they buy from markets in the plains, often at exorbitant prices. A Sericultural Farm at Paighat and a demonstration centre in Tirap have made some progress in supplying the disease-free eri and mulberry silk-worms. The Farm also distributes mulberry and other cuttings, with implements for rearing, reeling and spinning, and some two hundred families have now taken up sericulture as a part-time occupation.

Although remarkable progress has been made in the revival of some of the cottage industries, the NEFA Administration faces rather unusual difficulties. In the first instance, the population is



small and there are many demands upon it. It is still not self-sufficient in food and we have to be very careful about diverting people from the essential task of agriculture. Then it has been found that boys and girls have in the past come to the CITPC's not because they have really wanted to learn a craft, but because they have been attracted by the stipend of Rs. 35 which is offered to each trainee. Many girls have come to 'learn' weaving, although they knew perfectly well how to do it already, in order to avoid some domestic complication at home or to escape from an unwanted husband. It has also been found, as it has been found all over India, that only a small proportion of trainees continue the craft after they have finished their training. This is a special danger in the tribal areas where life in the plain fields is so hard that everyone wants to escape from it if he can. A boy who has some training in a craft believes that he has been trained for a job, and there have been cases where carpenters have refused to accept employment from the engineers and have preferred to become chaprasis, dak-runners or even punkah-pullers. This difficulty is specially acute in the case of new crafts which are not rooted in the village tradition.

The Administration is aware of these difficulties and is trying to solve them. It has laid down that every new trainee should be accepted, in the first instance, as a probationer and if after three or, in exceptional cases, six months it is found that he has no aptitude for his craft, he is either given a chance at another craft or is sent home. Recruitment is now being made with great care and the real motives of candidates are examined before they are admitted, for the value of a CITPC does not depend on the number of its trainees but on the quality of the work, the kind of person it produces, and its value on a long-term basis for the prosperity and artistic enrichment of the villages. We also have to consider how many craftsmen will be needed in any particular area. There is no point, for example, in producing fifty tailors in one Division, for most of them will find themselves without work and may drift to the plains.

In order to encourage the trainees to continue their crafts after they have finished their courses, a sort of passing-out parade is now being held at which the Political Officer himself explains the value of the training they have had and presents them with the



necessary tools and raw materials to make a start with it. For these things the trainees will have partly paid out of their products during the latter part of their training, when they have become sufficiently expert to make saleable goods.

In order to create the right psychological atmosphere so that the boys and girls will feel at home and will not develop needs and habits which will ultimately prevent them from returning to their villages or working with their hands, it has been decided that the buildings of the CTPCs will be simple and homely so that the trainees will work under the same sort of conditions that they have in their own villages. Each CTPC, in fact, is to be



Tamra blacksmiths

planned as a model village so that it will inspire not only the trainees but tribal villagers with ideas about building and planning their own homes. Whenever possible local craftsmen will be appointed as instructors, for in such crafts as cane-work and wood-carving they will be better than persons recruited from the plains.

When the trainees see their own people employed, they will be inspired by the hope that one day they themselves may become instructors. The presence of more and more tribal instructors will also help in creating the village atmosphere and so keep the trainees more in touch with their own homes. Stress has been laid on the importance of the CITPC staff learning the local languages and they have been asked to make lists of all technical words associated with the crafts they are teaching.

When instructors are brought from outside, they are asked to go into the villages and learn from the tribal craftsmen, for some sort of research and knowledge of the local techniques, aptitudes and talents is obviously essential.

It is clear that there is little point in establishing institutions to teach arts and crafts to people who already know them well and a number of weaving schools, for example, have been transformed into production units. These units arrange for the issue of yarn to the weavers and then buy back the finished products after deducting the cost of the yarn. The women generally work in their own homes, though a well-to-do Apa Tanj once erected a special weaving-shed at his own expense for the women in his village. Generally, however, the weavers prefer to work at home, as the craft is essentially a part-time occupation which can be practised in intervals of cooking and looking after the children. This scheme has already increased production in a number of places, especially in Temi, among the Mishmis of the Idu Valley and in the Tangsa area of Chunglang.

An interesting experiment has been tried in Bomdi La, where a number of small houses were built in the immediate neighbourhood of the CITPC. In these wood-carvers made bowls and cups and an artist painted them; Mumpu tailors and boot-makers made clothes and shoes; a silversmith worked at ornaments and scabbards for swords. This association of actual craftsmen with the trainees has proved of considerable value, for it has related the work of the official institution with private enterprise and everything has been homely, natural and thus effective.

Stress has been laid on the idea that production is not the monopoly of official organizations. The whole of NEFA, each Division as a whole, is regarded as a production unit, and the success of the Cottage Industries Scheme is to be judged by the



way the tribal people everywhere revive their traditional crafts and produce more goods for use or sale.

This has led to the drawing up of a Skilled Workers Scheme, whereby the CHTPC supervisors note the best artists and craftsmen in their area, supply them with raw materials and help them to market their goods.

The total effect of all these combined schemes for training centres, production units and the discovery of specially expert craftsmen has been to bring about a revival of the traditional arts and crafts of NEFA, and to introduce a number of valuable new crafts which not only supplement the income of the villagers but supply urgently needed articles for their own and official use.

### *Co-operative Societies*

Most of the NEFA tribes have a very strong social sense and it would not be too much to claim that every village is in its own way a co-operative society. Each household, each clan, each hamlet thinks, lives and works as a single unit. In the old days of war the people used to meet together and go out to fight as a united body. Today when peace has come to them they still retain an almost military unity and discipline. Before starting the long routine of cultivation they meet together and decide, with the help of their priests and elders, what part of the forest is to be cleared, the date on which they will set fire to the fallen trees and bushes and when they will sow their seed. They all go to work at the same time and usually in the same general area. Later, they again by common agreement begin to weed and, still later, to reap the crops. Although individuals may go on their own to set traps or to hunt and fish, all important hunting or fishing expeditions are undertaken on a community basis. In daily life the sorrows of one are the sorrows of all and, should somebody die, the whole village may be placed under a taboo. Should a house be burnt down, or a widow be unable to cultivate her field, the community comes together to give relief.

The same spirit shows itself in the tribal councils, which are in a very real sense tribunals of the whole population and express its will. The dormitories for the youth of the tribes which have them serve a valuable purpose in organizing the boys and girls for the service of the community.



Much of the land and forest is owned on a village basis although, within the general fabric of communal ownership, individuals have plots of land which they regard as their own. Hunting and fishing rights are owned by all the people of a village and are jealously preserved.

The sense of unity between members of the same clan is very strong. It often happens that an offender against the tribal law is unable to pay the fine imposed upon him by the council; in this case his fellow-clanmen club together to help him out. In former times it was the custom to kidnap and hold as hostage any member of the clan to which an offender belonged. Guilt was not a personal but a corporate matter and, though the taking of hostages has now stopped, the same feeling that something done by an individual is the responsibility of all persists.

There is thus a very strong tradition of co-operation among the people of NEFA. In the past it has been confined within the circle of the village, the clan or the tribe, but today there are signs that this spirit is spreading so that a group of villages comes together and the tribe rather than the clan becomes important. In time it will be the nation, and then all humanity, that will be the unifying ideal.

There is therefore in NEFA a hopeful situation for the development of Co-operative Societies, the first of which was started at Painghat in December 1955. The success achieved in giving contracts to whole villages rather than to individuals for the making of roads or erecting buildings suggests that in time Labour Co-operatives could easily be set up. Priority, however, has been given to the establishment of Consumers' Co-operative Societies, for the necessities of daily life are often difficult to obtain and it is an essential part of the Administration's fundamental policy to encourage tribal trade and to eliminate the middleman and the outsider. These co-operatives have had a good deal of success.

The most important of them is the Painghat Kebang Korot, which operates a saw-mill and a transport service. The interesting thing about the Kebang Korot is that entire villages have purchased blocks of shares through their Kebangs (councils), unlike the practice of primary co-operatives elsewhere whose membership is open only to individuals. The Nocte Co-operative General Stores at the headquarters of the Timp Division began

its work as a consumers' store at the beginning of 1957, but now has its own transport service as well as a small dairy farm with twenty cows to meet the needs of the headquarters staff. Another successful Co-operative Society is at Changlang, which has also



The Kebab Koots at Paighat

developed into a multipurpose organisation, maintaining a weaving production unit and a small dairy farm. It has been estimated that the average paid-up share capital of each society comes to Rs. 8,000 and the average membership is not less than 200.

This is a most hopeful enterprise. It is built up on the strongly democratic and co-operative character of the people. By issuing shares to village councils instead of merely to individuals it helps to promote the spirit of sharing. By associating production with marketing it ensures that the people obtain a ready sale for their goods. There are plans to sell the products of places which are surplus in textiles to other areas where the cultural pattern is similar, and in time I have no doubt that the co-operative stores will do much to promote inter-tribal trade and will stimulate cottage industries throughout the whole of NEFA.

A number of villagers have set up small shops of their own, sometimes secretly financed by Marwaris in the plains, but have found it difficult to make a profit. In Changlang four such tribal



shops have joined the Co-operative Society which purchases goods at wholesale rates for distribution to them. Each shop stocks twelve items at a time, and these items are changed annually so that each gets its fair share of quickly saleable goods.

The Administration is doing its best to ensure that the articles stocked in the co-operatives will be, so far as tribal needs are concerned, of good quality and taste. Samples of blankets, for example, which are warm and of good design and colour, have been issued and the managers are urged to concentrate on the sale of hand-woven fabrics and to avoid introducing unattractive articles from the plains. If the co-operatives can save the people money, preserve their taste and bring to them things that will enrich their daily life, they will have fulfilled a vital function in NEFA society.

### *The Pace of Development*

One of the problems facing not only NEFA but all the tribal areas in India is the pace of development. In Madhya Pradesh and Bombay, where the tribal people are very poor, have lost much of their culture and have been in touch with the outside world for centuries, progress should be fairly rapid, provided it can be adjusted to the social, cultural and psychological background. Such progress, if it is carefully directed, may even revive many of the good things that have been lost. But in other areas, where the people are only just coming into contact with modern civilisation, and where their culture and traditions are still vigorously maintained, it is desirable to advance with caution. Elsewhere in India, says Mr K. L. Mehra, 'the scope for development is unlimited and governed only by lack of finance and shortage of technical personnel. So is the case in NEFA. Paradoxically enough, however, we have sometimes to slow down the tempo of development, to avoid the feeling among the people that our welfare schemes are being imposed upon them. A child must be allowed to develop according to the laws of natural growth. He must be able to walk before he can run.'

And the Prime Minister has said that, while the administration must be extended throughout the whole of NEFA and especially along the international frontier, 'we should not overdo it, but should be cautious in our approach. Every step taken should be



watched carefully for its reactions so that our next trip may be a whiter one.

The Administration, therefore, has placed the original programme of the Second Five Year Plan over a period of ten instead of five years. The goal is exactly the same, but it will not be practicable, perhaps not even desirable, to reach it quite so soon. Realism is the note of the Administration's policy. As Mr K. L. Mehta has said again: 'There is little point in laying down targets which are unachievable and making promises which cannot be fulfilled.' And this is particularly important in the border areas, where the people, in their simplicity and faith, expect any promise to be fulfilled immediately).

There are many reasons, both practical and sociological, for this. The population is small and local labour is only available for a few months in the year. It would be undesirable to import labourers from outside, even if they were willing to go into the interior; it would be difficult or impossible to feed them if they did go there; and the fewer outsiders, especially at the labour level, the better. Then in parts of NEFA it is difficult to get local materials and, even where they are available, to move them to where they are needed. For portage is a constant difficulty. In Manipur today it is almost impossible to persuade the villagers to carry loads and even in NEFA, although the people do carry them, they do not really like doing so, and every additional officer appointed and every new outpost opened increases the demands upon them and diverts them from the essential task of agriculture. It will take many years to substitute mechanised transport and even the introduction of animal transport raises almost as many problems as it solves; you cannot take horses or mules across a cane suspension bridge, and a large staff would be needed to maintain the animals. Although sensational progress has been made in building roads, they are bound to take a long time in view of the heavy rainfall and the unstable geological formation of the country.

Another difficult problem is how to balance the need to solve urgent, even dramatic, human problems against the equally important need of not overwhelming the local people with too many outsiders, a matter to which the Prime Minister has drawn pointed attention.

What I am anxious about particularly is to avoid large numbers of outsiders being sent to the tribal areas in some capacity or other. If that happens, however well we may train them, the mere numbers will produce what I would call a revolutionary situation in the tribal areas. We will lose grip of the situation then and will have to content ourselves with drifting and accepting many things that we do not like.

I have said above that even if we train all the people we send there, the consequences are likely to be bad. It is obvious, however, that we cannot give adequate training to every minor official who is sent there. Some of our people who go there look upon the tribesmen in a superior way. They make fun of them and sometimes they run after their women-folk. All this creates a multitude of problems.<sup>1</sup>

And there is another important matter affecting all the tribal areas. If too many of the available posts are filled by outsiders, by the time tribal candidates are trained there will be comparatively few jobs for them in their own regions, since it will be difficult in practice to terminate the services of the existing staff to make room for them.

The Administration is trying to solve this problem by making many of its officers 'multipurpose' in function, so that a Base Subcommissioner, for example, can do the work of an Inspector of Schools in addition to his own duties when he is on tour. Another way is to weed out the inefficient and the unsuitable. The technique of a Single Line Administration makes possible considerable simplification and economy. Challenging human problems, such as the abolition of slavery, the checking of opium-addiction, the cure of the terrible dermatitis that affects some of the northern tribes, demand men, and men of the highest quality, but the danger of a mere multiplication of officials is constantly kept in mind. We remember that Gandhiji used to say that the best Government was the Government that governed least.

NEPA may be divided into three main belts, the foothills, the middle and the northern. Along the international frontier and in the foothills areas, where the people have been for a long time in touch with the plains, there is an obvious case for going ahead comparatively quickly. In the central belt, however, the introduction of staff and development programmes will proceed more slowly, for progress will have to depend on land communications, and it will be less easy for the people to adapt themselves. Here



development will be stepped up around the divisional headquarters and outposts, and NE5 blocks will, as far as possible, be located near them, where they can be effectively supervised, and supported either by jeep-tracks or by landing-grounds.

At the same time the Administration is pressing forward as vigorously as possible with its training schemes for the tribal people of NEFA so that they will be able, as I have noted in another chapter, to undertake the administration of their own affairs.

In all development work in the tribal areas, it is necessary to balance material gains against psychological dangers. If we are to avoid the disasters that have endangered tribal integrity in other parts of the world, of which ample examples have been given in this book, if we are to develop along the lines of a scientific philosophy, it is essential to give the tribes time to adjust themselves to allow them a breathing-space. We bear in mind Mr Nehru's warnings that we are not to overdo it, that we may, in our eagerness to do good, do grievous harm instead, that we may overwhelm the people by sheer weight of numbers and a multiplicity of schemes.

For in the first place it is the quality of the material progress rather than its quantity that matters. In every expansion programme there are two points of view. One is to increase staff and institutions regardless of quality, on the principle that 'Something is better than nothing'. The other is to go slowly and carefully, laying firm foundations on the principle that 'It is better to do a little well than a lot badly'. I have no doubt whatever that in the tribal areas the second view is to be preferred. It is better not to open schools unless they can be well equipped and staffed by devoted teachers. There is no point in scattering second-rate subordinate staff all over the place unless they are really going to help the villagers, for they may merely cause resentment and criticism. Mr Nehru has said that 'If we are going to build the house of India's future strong and secure and beautiful, we will have to dig deep for the foundations.'

And the second criterion by which we should judge our work is the kind of effect it has on the people. We must not be dominated by statistics. It is not the number of boys in a school or CHTC, not even the number of patients going to a hospital, still



less the figures in official reports, that matter, but the kind of life and character that is created. "The real question ultimately," as Mr. Nehru has said, "is the quality of human beings we produce. . . I have been thinking more and more of what an eminent economist has called "investment in man". Investment in industry and agriculture is all-important, but investment in man is *even more* important."

## Chapter Four

### THE PROBLEM OF DRESS

*I am horrified at the picture of these people being made to give up their old artistic clothes or even lack of clothes in favour of a dirty pair of shorts or some such thing. I am also greatly disturbed at certain shabby articles of modern civilization replacing the artistic products of these people. I am quite clear that we should prevent cheap mill-cloth going there as far as we can. We are in fact encouraging hand-spun and hand-woven goods all over India. Surely we should use only these in this area for presents and for other purposes. Indeed the right course would be to get yarn woven into artistic patterns and encourage this artistic craft there.*

*I do not agree with the criticism that the preservation of tribal art and tribal dress indicates a desire to keep the tribal people as museum specimens. The danger is that these people will lose their culture and have nothing to replace it. I have no doubt that with the opening out of roads and other communications, these remote areas will be influenced by the rest of India. What has usually happened is that these artistic primitive people lose their artistry and get nothing to replace it. I would rather that they remain museum specimens than become such representatives of so-called modern progress. Of course I do not wish them to feel that we are stopping the 'clock of progress', though I have my grave doubts as to whether this clock is one of progress or not. We do not wish to stop them from doing what they like, but we must not encourage them to go the wrong way.*

—JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

I have given an important place to the subject of Dress, for it is a symbol of so many things and raises in a concentrated form most of the problems that we have to face in other matters. 'Man's earthly interests are all hooked and harnessed together and held up by clothes.'



A Wanchin girl on the way to her husband's house for the first time.





An Ila Minkim couple. From a painting by Shiarax Chavda

It is a commonplace that dress is something much more than a mere protection of the body against the weather. It is a form of art, in which some of the finest minds of all nations have laboured their attention. It is a symbol, whereby a man's social status can be determined. Like the feathers of birds, to which it is often compared, it is a form of allure leading to mating between the sexes. Although today we live in a drab and ugly world, where the dress of men at least has lost its former beauty, there were times in the past, and there may again be times in the future, when clothes will regain their colour and beauty.

'Fashion,' says James Law, 'sums up all the subconscious tendencies, the social trends, the economic conditions, even the religious aspirations of the time.'

The problem of dress is thus not a minor matter for anyone who has the welfare of India's tribes at heart. Up till recently, many tribesmen had, and some still have, their own distinctive way of clothing themselves, and this is often artistic and well adapted to the conditions of their life. A very few prefer to wear skins and furs, though they all have a reserve of cloth to wear on occasion; others have a very simple dress, the men being content with a loin-cloth and the women with a skirt, leaving the upper part of the body bare, though they usually have some kind of shawl for protection against the cold, and make ingenious rain-coats of grass. A third class has more elaborate clothing, such as may be found in Kameng, Sang and Lohit, while a fourth has begun to affect a fantastic medley of tribal and semi-civilised attire; a tribal hat perches above a splendid array of beads, a cast-off dinner jacket is worn above an apron adorned with cowries. And finally, there are a number of tribal people who have taken to full, though not always correct, European dress—it is very rare to see one of them in a dhoti.

The advance of the Administration into NEFA has created a cultural ferment, and the people are on the move. Perhaps our greatest problem, and it is one which lays a very heavy load of responsibility on every officer, is to ensure that the move will be upward and not downward.

We do not want to put the clock back or preserve NEFA as a sort of museum. But we do want the best for the people, and in this important matter, they should not be left without guidance.



Otherwise, it will be in the shops that they will learn their lesson and the Minister will be the Seniorial Adviser to the Administration. Tribal dress should not remain static; it should grow and develop, but on its own lines. This will not be done by putting everyone into shirts and shorts, blouses and frocks: that destroys tribal dress altogether. Nor will it be done by adding to the existing dress the cheapest and tawdriest singlets, blankets, plastic ornaments, sofa tops and other products of the mills.

Fashion is Folly's child, and in an area where our policy is one of planned and scientific advance, we should not withhold tactful and intelligent guidance. As the Prime Minister has said, 'There must be some check to prevent the degradation of public taste.'

We must remember, of course, that tribal values in dress are not our values. An Englishman may feel embarrassed if he fails to carry gloves on a formal occasion. If he forgets to wear a tie with a dinner-jacket he will feel positively naked. On the other hand, a Phou or Chang may be perfectly happy with nothing covering his buttocks, yet he will be awkward if he has omitted to put on his ivory armbands. A tribal girl may feel more embarrassed if she has no bracelets (for this may suggest that she is a widow) than if she has no blouse. We must not, therefore, judge tribal standards of dress by our own; above all, we must not apply our ideas of 'decency' to people who have lived for generations in an innocence which we have never known. We must banish the mentality which holds that: 'Fashion is what I wear myself. The unfashionable is what other people wear.'

Let us now consider, under a number of headings, the various aspects of tribal dress, and the possible consequences of the wrong kind of change. We will consider the subject in general first, and then see how it may be applied to NEFA.

### *Social and Political Aspects of Dress*

James Lever has proposed three fundamental principles of clothing: hierarchy, utility and attractiveness. Throughout the world clothes are used to proclaim social rank and status. There is a distinctive dress for royalty, at least on ceremonial occasions, a conventional dress for lawyers, doctors and clergy. The political use of clothes is illustrated by the distinctive uniform recently laid down by the Congress President for the use of Congressmen. A



Congressman should wear a white cap, a shirt, pyjamas or a dhoti, and a pair of chappals, and should carry a leather bag.

Similarly in tribal Assam, dress is, in certain areas at least, carefully graded according to rank. In the Naga group of tribes, a Chief wears one kind of attire, a commoner another. A



Wancho Chief of Thang (after Dalton, 1872)

successful warrior has privileges denied to others. A Sherdukpen Thang can put on ceremonial dress allowed only to the aristocracy.



India. I was told in Taeniang by more than one Christian youth that 'what we want is American dress, language and way of life.' Our boys and girls, so strangely westernized, would not be happy even in the Assam Plains, where there is a simplicity of living and a beauty and innocence of dress that we are in some danger of losing in NEFA.

A change of dress often means a new psychology, a secession of the traditions of one's tribe, a sense of being ashamed of it. This leads to a break-down of tribal discipline: a youth in smart English clothes and a sola topi will not obey his tribal chief, who looks so 'jungle' in his classic attire; girls in meretricious blouses and even trousers, with lipstick on their lips and phoney wrinkles in their hair, are already showing signs of rebellion against the discipline of the community. A certain degree of rebellion is good and is a necessary stimulant to progress, but it is dangerous to foster a rapid break-down of tribal law and discipline. Social collapse may easily lead to moral degradation and political disturbance.

This does not happen where a tribe has had time to adjust itself to new conditions, and some of the most educated tribal people, who have gradually acclimatized themselves over a period of many years, are among those who are proudest of their race and its traditions.

### *The Aesthetic Importance of Dress*

The aesthetic result of a change of dress is usually disastrous. Many of the NEFA tribes weave, and weave well, with patterns and colours that have evolved over a long period of years and which are almost always artistic, durable and appropriate. As Dr Horton says: 'All Naga tribes have a most remarkable appreciation of the effective and picturesque in dress, and their use of colour is usually in extraordinary good taste and particularly well adapted to the surroundings in which it is displayed. The designs of their cloths are conspicuous for the right use of brilliant colours, while their ornaments of black and white hornbill feathers, cowries, ivory and scarlet hair seem peculiarly well fitted to the deep green or bluish background usually afforded by the well-wooded hills which are their home.' External influence throughout the tribal areas has done much to banish this beauty, and the artistic



sense has too often been stifled in 'the currents of a gloomy and puritanical view of life which is being imposed on them just as Europe is beginning to escape from its shackles.'

One of the greatest of the many crimes that 'civilisation' has committed against the tribal people all over the world is to have made them ashamed of their own art and culture.

As long ago as 1901 Rabindranath Tagore foresaw the aesthetic impoverishment that would follow the adoption of European dress in India, and his essay *Nabaler Nakal* is so important and typical that I will briefly summarise it. Tagore begins by quoting the saying that there is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous. In Sanskrit rhetoric, he continues, *adbbhat* *vata* expresses what sublimity does in English. But there are two varieties of *adbbhat*, the one that causes wonderment and the other that provokes laughter.' He goes on to describe how on a short trip to Darjeeling, he encountered both these varieties of *adbbhat*—on the one hand the divine Himalaya, and on the other the Bengali in English dress—the sublime and the ridiculous in close juxtaposition.<sup>1</sup>

Tagore does not, of course, think that English dress is in itself ridiculous, or even that the Bengali in English dress is necessarily ridiculous. But he does insist that the wrong kind of European dress on the wrong kind of Bengali, if not pathetic, is certainly absurd. 'The hat on his head, perhaps, is out of keeping with the dress he wears; perhaps he wears a collar but no tie; perhaps his coat is of a colour that would horrify an Englishman; or perhaps he comes out in what an Englishman would consider undress, fit only to be worn in one's bedroom. Why this unconscious clowning? If an Englishman were to go about in a Bengali locality in a dhoti—with the *kurta* in front and the *kurcha* behind—he could not expect to win the respect of those who saw him. Our Bengali brother who visits the court of the King of the Mountains dressed in his clown's motley only spends his hard-earned money to provide fun and entertainment for his English spectators.'

Tagore thinks that the reason why so many poor people take to English dress is that it makes them superior to their neighbours, but he questions whether this really achieves its end. Most people *are* too poor to dress properly in foreign clothes.

One or two jackdaws may be able to put on peacock's feathers becomingly, but the majority of them will never succeed in doing so, for they have no access to the society of peacocks. Under these circumstances, to save the entire jackdaw society from ridi-



Raja Chief of the last century  
(after Bailey, 1847)

cule, the one or two successful imitators must resist the temptation of wearing their disguise. Otherwise the ludicrous spectacle of jackdaws flaunting their ill-assorted and ill-fitting borrowed plumes will be seen everywhere.

There is no more abject spectacle than the Indian dressed in shabby and ill-fitting European clothes; he can never look so poor and lowly in Indian dress. One reason for this is that in European dress there is no simplicity, it involves much planning and effort.

When poverty-stricken India stands up clothed in the ragged and cast-off clothes of England, what a grotesquely alien form her poverty will take! What is only lamentable today will then become food for cruel laughter. The meagreness of dress that is today covered by a simple humility will then suffer ruthless exposure in the half-naked vulgarity of tattered coat and trousers.

Tayler concludes that 'if we remember that a man does not derive his dignity from his clothes but rather lends dignity to them by wearing them, then we shall see that the wearing of coarse-spun *dhoti* and *chadar* is by no means a thing to be ashamed of.

Vishwagar, and not only Vishwagar but scores of other great Brahmin pandits, were incomparably nobler in character and dignity than any court-clad England-trained person we know; and it is a matter of common knowledge that the great Brahmins who came brought India to the peak of civilization were scarcely clad in the simplest drapes.' Tagore did not feel able to press for *dhuti* in offices, but he did urge some kind of Indian dress which would be natural and appropriate. I have no doubt whatever what his advice would have been, had he been presented with a choice between a Mishmi cum and a dhoti; or a beautiful Phum or Chang loin-cloth with its gleaming brass and a pair of shorts. Incidentally, I see no reason why the gorgeous perineal band worn by some tribes should not be transformed into an ample and artistic apron such as is worn by the Songtians and Senoi. In Siang there are very fine such 'aprons' made of tiger or leopard skin. A new type of loin-cloth, beautifully designed and woven in the GTPC at Mon, is becoming popular among the Konyaks.

But it is not only that a change of dress spoils the æsthetic appearance of the people; there is something more. For many tribes dress and personal decoration is the one medium of art. A large part of their imagination, interest and creative ability is devoted to their own persons; much of their wit lies in their wardrobes. Some of the tribal groups are good wood-carvers, and much of this carving is of ornaments to be worn on the body. Other tribes have no real art except the weaving of cloth, and the rim-work through which they make their remarkable sun hats and girdles. Many of the tribal boys and girls are expert in making ornaments out of simple and natural things.

An Aka or Mishmi youth is himself a work of art. But take him to school, and at once he strips himself of his glory, and in a few days this splendid boy, who formerly had the air of a prince, looks like a confidant.

Is this progress?

The boy himself probably thinks it is. In one of his novels, Mulh Raj Anand describes how, when he was small, he was so impressed by the importance of the white khaki and the respect they excited, that he made himself a complete set of European dress out of paper, copying an advertisement in a trade catalogue. The paradox of this is that, just at a time when the western world



is showing signs of rebellion against the ugliness and drabness at least of its male attire, Africa and the East are adopting fashions that are already disappearing elsewhere.

In a witty and interesting book, *The Peacock's Tail*, about the clothes of modern western man, Pearl Binder, who believes that it is almost exclusively among the tribal people of the world that we still find 'vitality in sartorial creation', deplores the sacrifice of beauty in the machine-civilization of today. 'Beauty is not something that can be switched off and on like the radio, but, on the contrary, beauty is something that we must seek out and cherish, and which must permeate our whole civilization, or else our civilization will wither.' 'Industrialized man,' she says again, 'has become so busy that he has neither the time nor the inclination to stop and take a good look at himself. If he did he would realize that beauty had been wrenched from him. In his bath he is a man, full of magic potentialities. Dressed, the glamour has gone. He is Mr Nobody. Dull in colour, unimpressive in cut, distinguished from his neighbours in no particular, his clothes might be a prison uniform. Indeed, that is precisely what they are, for his spirit is in goal.' 'On the crowded streets of our great cities, in the bus, the train, the plane, the eye is saddened by the same dreary made uniform, shapeless and lacking colour. Rich men, poor men, laborers, intellectuals, bankers, barrow boys, old men, young men all today dress like robots. There is a terrible cancelling out in their attire, a neuter quality which can only be described as an emasculation.'

Man wants to be respectable, he wants to be modern, he is afraid of originality, he is afraid of beauty. And this humiliates him in the presence of women, for they are getting prettier and prettier (certainly in India), while he is getting duller and less manly in appearance.

Only one thing in dress is really modern—and that is beauty. Beauty, eternally renewed in every generation, undiscouraged by big business or bad taste, is the most vital thing in the world and must triumph in the end. The hill people of India, itself a country which has always been dedicated to ideals of grace and loveliness, still have much beauty in their lives. By desiring to preserve it, we are not checking their progress in the modern world; we are helping them to inspire that world.

### *The Moral Influence of Dress*

The effect of an alien type of dress on people accustomed to light and simple attire has been carefully studied by Dr Elphinstich in his book on the *Kashmir of South India*.

The first result is the creation of a sense of shame and embarrassment. Elphinstich describes how a Kadian woman, who normally goes about with breasts exposed, will, on the approach of a stranger, 'bow down and sit in a crouching position covering her breasts with crossed arms and spread palms.' 'The generally well-shaped, healthy breasts of Kadian women, once a matter of pride and a sign of health and fertility, have thus come to be considered by them as something to be ashamed of, almost as something that is repulsive and degrading.' He points out that this feeling has been created by the plainseers who are 'in the habit of laughing orientally and passing remarks.' Even little Kadian girls of five and six years have begun to 'imitate the humiliating gestures, covering their scarce discernible baby nipples with outspread palms, crouching and bowing down in a servile fashion as soon as an outsider appears.'

This has had its psychological effect. In the first place, it has made the Kadian woman servile instead of proud. 'The same person who looks dignified, free and self-confident in her healthy simplicity—well adapted to the climate and open-air work—becomes a caricature of dirt-covered, cringing servility. The dress-mania of modern civilisation, western and oriental alike, demands us full share in sacrifice of human happiness and self-respect.'

Next, the Kadian woman, weary of crouching, has begun to buy brightly-coloured European blouses at fantastic prices, which she can ill afford. But the blouses are not sufficient to hide completely 'the indecent mammary appendages', and so she goes a step further and wears a singlet underneath the blouse. The introduction of the singlet into tropical countries has been 'to create an garment of subtle self-torture for women as well as men.' It is uncomfortable; it is the most fruitful source of itch; and in the heat it clings unboundedly to the body.

'Modern Kadian women quite naturally find it increasingly difficult to go to the jungle and dig for edible roots in the dusty



ground, thereby spoiling their costly blouses and getting overheated in their thick singlets. To avoid both, they begin to sit at home. In the laziness and uniformity of this latest form of portab, other new affectations are being adopted from the plains-people.\* Heavy oiling and flattening of the naturally curled hair is one of them and this wastes much time.

This throws a new burden on the Kadan man who has to work harder to make up for his wife's laziness and to provide her with things she demands. If he does not provide them she will find someone who will. A shadow falls on the home. The husband begins to feel resentment at his wife; she is no longer his equal partner; she is now an economic liability. And better clothes mean actually a lower position for women. From a free and equal partner in life's struggles and joys, the Kadan woman is gradually but steadily sliding into the position of: first a commodity, then a sexual sex, and ultimately a drudge. Once an equal partner of men in the strenuous but healthy life of independent food-gathering, she now becomes the slave of enslaved men, working in the iron grip of the new order which foreign clothing habit, economic pressure and direct propaganda are introducing into this originally bilateral society.

I think that this elaborate analysis, which is supported by my own observations over a long period of years in Bastar and Orissa, deserves careful consideration.

Many years ago Bernard Shaw delivered a telling speech on the Sex Appeal of Clothes. He pointed out that there are two types of amateurs: 'One set seeks to minimise sex appeal by a maximum of clothing; the other seeks to maximise sex appeal by a minimum of clothing.' Both are completely and hopelessly wrong. 'If you want sex appeal raised to the utmost point, there is only one way of doing it, and that is by clothes. In hot climates the purpose of clothing must have been sex appeal and not protection from the inclemency of the weather; because in such places the weather tempts people to take off their clothes instead of to put them on.'

Bernard Shaw illustrated this point by a description of the Victorian woman. She was a masterpiece of sex appeal. 'She was sex appeal from the top of her head to the soles of her feet. She was clothed, of course, from head to foot; all clothed! Every-



thing about her except her cheeks and her nose was a guilty secret, a thing you had to guess at. All young men and boys then thrilled with the magic and mystery of the invisible world under those clothes." Shaw pointed out that on the other hand, "those actresses of the French stage who made a speciality of sex appeal never undressed themselves in public. I do not know how many petticoats they wore; but at any rate instead of exposing their persons they just gave you a little glimpse of what looked like a down-filled pink petticoat round the ankles; and the effect was tremendous. The result was that the Victorian age was an exceedingly immoral age."

Shaw spoke of the 'significant spread of nudism', especially in post-war Austria, 'where you have clubs of people who have the extremely wholesome habit of meeting one another without anything on at all; for that got rid of sex appeal altogether.' By contrast he found some of the churches in Italy full of notices ordering women to be fully clothed, 'all suggesting some impropriety or other which would never come into the head of a decent normal person if it were not officially placarded.' Every placard pointed out some particular aphoristic effect that would be produced on young men if women were not muffled up so that no one could see that they had bodies.' And he concluded his lecture with the words: 'I point no moral. I have simply given you the expert's practical directions. If you want sex appeal, clothes. If you want to minimise sex appeal, get rid of as many clothes as possible.'

It is interesting to find that Mahatma Gandhi took a rather similar view of clothes and nudity. When some of his followers came to him in South Africa and spoke of the evil custom of the Africans who went about unclothed, he rebuked them, pointing out that the evil lay, not in the custom, but in the impure eye of the beholder: 'When a large society follows a particular custom, it is quite possible that the custom is harmless enough, even if it seems highly improper to the members of another society. These Negroes have no time to be staring at one another... it is only vanity which makes us look on the Negroes as savages. They are not the barbarians we imagine them to be.'

And on another occasion Gandhiji said this: 'I believe that the ideal state of man is *digambara*. I hold the state of nakedness

dear. Were I living in a forest, I would go without clothes. Nature has clothed mankind in skin. . . . The loftiest beauty of man lies in his nudity.'

Generally speaking, the fewer clothes a tribe wears, the stronger is its sense of sexual morality, especially in relation to outsiders. This fact has been observed in many parts of the world, and I myself found it strikingly illustrated in the case of the Cabuls of French Togo, most of whom go completely naked and where there is a very high standard of morality indeed.

I have explained this, because some conventionally educated members of our staff, and even more their wives, are profoundly shocked when confronted with people who are scantily clad. This feeling of prudery, and the artificial attempts to clothe the people which it inspires, is wrong. It is probable that clothes will come everywhere, but let them come naturally: let the people make their own in their own way, and because clothing is an art, not out of a sense of embarrassment and shame.

### *The Economics of Dress*

The introduction of alien dress is bound to have a considerable effect on tribal economies. Hitherto in many (though not all) areas the tribal women have done their own weaving. Where weaving was unknown, clothes of skin, grasses, bark and so on were worn. But the opening up of the country has brought the danger that the natural hand-weaving industry, which would have delighted the heart of Gandhiji, may die out in face of foreign competition. Once people find that they can buy cloth, and still more when cloth so bought is regarded as conferring a greater dignity and social status, they will cease to weave.

As they cease to weave they begin to send their money out of the village and almost always into the pockets of non-tribals. This makes them dependent on a class of adventurers who are the last persons whom one would choose to guide and lead the simple tribesmen.

A girl who comes down to Panchhat to sell some of her farm produce may in the evening attend a lantern lecture by a Medical Officer on Improved Nutrition. He will urge her to buy eggs or milk for the nourishment of her child with the money she has just earned. But it is much more likely that she will purchase



some gaudy lot of cloth for a blouse, some cosmetics or plastic ornaments—things that she does not need, that are wasteful and out of place—instead of using her money for the advantage of herself or her children.

Harrison described the subsidiary effects of 'Shorian' as follows: 'Economically the "unison natives" were thus firmly yoked to the trader, or to coffee or sandalwood production, so that they might get clothes; they were supplied with the poorest clothes that are quickly in this roasting climate. Hygienically, clothes could not be kept clean within the tribal standard of living, so that skin-disease, tuberculosis and parasites benefited. Psychologically a new element of shame and secrecy was introduced into the open, balanced approach of the natives.'

One of the chief reasons for our stress on the preservation of tribal dress in NEFA is, as I show later, an economic one, and already progress has been made in controlling imports, guiding expenditure and promoting the hand-loom industry, all of which save the people money or at least keep it in their own area. Swadeshi is as important for NEFA today as it once was for the whole of India.

### *Dress and Health*

The adverse effect of unfamiliar and unsuitable dress on the health of primitive people has been reported by observers from all over the world, and I can only refer to a few of the authorities on the subject. Thus, Mr J. P. Mills, who had a wide experience of the Asian tribes, observes:

'Foreign clothes are dangerous from more than one point of view. They undoubtedly spread disease. A tribal who wears them does not always change them when he should; probably he has no others to put on. A man will arrive at the top of a hill streaming with perspiration and then take his coat off to get cool. The wearing of foreign clothes has, in my opinion, contributed to the spread of pulmonary disease in the hills. Secondly, they are entirely unfitted to the tribal mode of life. Long skirts for women are not suitable garments for weeding in rice drenched with rain. A dhoti or shorts are positively worse. The close-fitting bodices for women and shirts for men are positively dangerous in a climate where workers are soaked daily with rain or perspiration.'



A book which should be studied by all administrators of tribal areas is *Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia*, edited by the famous physician and psychologist, W. H. R. Rivers. The essays are contributed by a number of scientists and, though they disagree on some matters, they are unanimous on the subject of clothes. All of them include the wearing of European clothes as



Singata, Chief a hundred years ago  
(after Dalton and Butler)

one, if not the most important, of the principal factors in bringing about the spread of lung disease and the consequent decimation of those who have adopted them. In Melanesia, not only lung disease, but dysentery, itch and yaws were all propagated by the foolish habit of wearing English clothes quite unsuited to the temperament and environment of the wearers. 'Everything should be done to keep the people natural and unaffected, and to prevent a false modesty and artificiality. It cannot be said that modesty is encouraged by the wearing of clothes; perhaps even the reverse is true. . . . One of the most pathetic contrasts in the islands is the lithe and glossy skin of the healthy islander and the dirty, overblown Melanesian masquerading as a white man.' In

Melanesia even the missionaries now, as well as administrators, recommend a return to the Fijian or Samoan *lavalava*; a primitive pattern, and in this book it is a missionary who points out that the very infants suffer from the clothes-wearing habits of their mothers, who must carry them on their backs on wet days with sudden cloth on all sides of them instead of, at worst, on the outside only.

Harrison, whom I have already quoted, says of 'Shurtan' in the New Hebrides that skin-disease, tuberculous and parasitic are the chief beneficiaries of the policy of more clothes. Gripen points out that in Baster it is because the Hill Marias wear so little that they are 'far freer from scabies, itch and ringworm than the tribesmen of the plains, who more and more are imitating Hindu clothes, but are too poor to afford either much clothing or spare time. At the numerous State dispensaries there are the commonest complaints and treatment is useless because the patients will not leave off the dirty infected clothing.'

There has recently been an interesting discussion of this subject in *Time* magazine. Professor Huntington of Yale has argued that the highest forms of civilization must develop in temperate climates. If a country is too cold, its people have to struggle too hard just to stay alive. If it is too hot, they relax into a slovenly languid attitude. In reply to this, an anthropologist, Dr Wulbin of Massachusetts, has declared that it is neither the heat nor the humidity, but over-heating that robs tropical residents of their energy. The human body has its own methods of keeping itself at the proper temperature. Heat escapes by radiation, by convection and radiation to the air and through the cooling effect of evaporation. When it does not escape fast enough, the temperature of the internal organs rises. The heart pumps harder to carry more blood to the surface. Sometimes so much blood is needed for carrying heat that not enough remains to make the body work properly.

In warm weather or during exercise the evaporation of sweat does most of the final cooling. But the body cannot produce an unlimited amount of sweat, and if it is forced to do so, there are various ill effects. So the natural reaction of the overheated human is to sit still until his temperature falls. In the long run this 'defensive' attitude lowers the cultural level.



A Taron (Dagiti) Misumi girl





A Galla man and wife in central Siam

Dr Wulfin describes experiments on how clothes hamper the body in keeping itself cool. They act as mantles, checking heat-loss by radiation. More important, they create near the skin a layer of hot, moisture-saturated air. Sweat cannot evaporate until it has soaked through the clothing, and then its cooling effect is largely wasted. Europeans in the tropics who wear helmets and heavy clothing to keep off the sun make a great mistake. The less they wear, the better off they will be.

The alleged inferiority of hot-country civilisations is a myth. The ancient cultures of Egypt, Mesopotamia, of the Mayans and Indonesia were not developed under climates cooler than they are today. There has been no significant changes in climate—except in the climate next to the people's dwellings.

In the old days, people in the tropics wore little clothing, usually nothing above the waist. Now tropical people, of European culture, clinging to European customs, go clothed as if they were dressing for a chilly British spring. The natural result is lassitude and a lowered cultural level.<sup>1</sup> The Balinese, despite the warm humidity of their climate, have maintained for centuries a vigorous art and culture, partly because they have had the sense not to wear too much. Today, under the influence of an imported puritanism, they are being forced to cover themselves and are in danger of falling into lassitude and decay.

Equally, scientific observers point out that clothing is not necessary as a defence against the cold. The insular group known as Tierra del Fuego, at the southern extremity of South America, is afflicted by a bitterly cold and raw climate. Yet the majority of the inhabitants go naked or almost naked, and are impervious to cold. Some of the NEFA tribes which are most indifferent to clothes live on the tops of hills. The human body is admirably adjusted, in its natural state, to varying climates. Once, however, it takes to clothes, it needs more and more of them.

Investigations among the Kenyaks of Tucsang, who are typical of many others, have shown that in the interior villages, where the people like to wear very little (though they all have clothes to wear on occasion), there are few cases of skin infection, but villages near the sub-divisional headquarters at Moa and the plains of Asama, where the people have taken to wearing more clothes, are seriously affected by scabies and other skin-diseases.



A medical expert who surveyed the area wrote: "People in these parts have taken to wearing old, dirty rags which are never changed. Some of them were naked and stinking with pus, but still we found the patients unwilling to part with them. I have never seen such severe skin infections. In some cases it took hours to clean all the pus and scabs before we could apply the medicine. There were instances where there was hardly any patch of skin free from the infection. It is good to wear clothes when one can afford to keep them clean. Otherwise it is better and healthier to remain naked. I would certainly choose to remain naked all my life than be clothed and suffer from the dreadful infections I saw during my visits to some of these villages."

This increase in skin infections appears to have been very rapid, tribal A. L. C. porters, who are issued with clothes by the Administration, being specially afflicted with scabies.

It is obviously true that 'the right of a healthy skin is more decent than that of a dirty shirt.'

### *Three Important Points*

In all our efforts to preserve the colour and beauty of the best elements of tribal dress and ornamentation, it is necessary to bear in mind three important points.

The first is that our approach to the whole subject must be a dynamic one: we must keep on the move. It is no use merely bewailing the passing of picturesque old fashions and trying to freeze existing custom as it is. Change will come everywhere, even in the remotest places, and our task is not to check it but to guide it. If a culture does not evolve, it dies. Our aim should be to bring more colour, more beauty into NEFA. As the people become 'civilized' we should help them to evolve a form of dress which will remain truly tribal, but more artistic, more attractive and more appropriate.

I cannot myself believe that there is any real reason why NEFA should lose its distinctiveness, its beauty and its variety. It will be a tragedy if it does.

The example of the people of the Waigal Valley of central New Guinea suggests that progress does not necessarily mean a loss of beauty. 'These people,' says Colin Simpson in his fascinating



book *Adam in Plumes*, 'are more colourful in their adornment now than they were before they had contact with civilization twenty years ago.... This is so against the rule that civilization is the bleach and solvent of tribal colour that the circumstances



A Mingo girl

may well be unique, but it is quite explicable.' He goes on to describe how traders brought into the country great quantities of mother-of-pearl shell, which was the basis of ornamentation but which previously the people had found difficult to obtain; they imported bird-of-paradise plumes from other areas; they supplied a better and more colourful type of pigment for painting the face.

'That they remain as decorative as they are is not merely due to the fact that civilisation has touched them only lightly; the Administration has, more or less, set its face against the introduction of useless to the men, and noxious to that dreadful early-missionary shroud, the Mother Hubbard smock, been inflicted on the women.'

A twofold policy, of providing the right kind of things in the shops and of checking the import of the wrong kind of things has thus had an excellent result.

The second point is that we must recognize the fact that a certain number of tribal boys and girls will become largely 'modernized', at all events in such externals as dress and general style of living. These will be the Political Officers, the politicians, the doctors and lawyers, the engineers of the future. We may hope that they will not grow up to be ashamed of their race and with a scorn of the simple ways and beliefs of their fathers, but they are—in the context of modern India which so curiously prefers the drabness of western attire to its own traditions—almost certain to give up most of their own sartorial fashions. This need not necessarily be true of girls, for if the development of the hand-loom industry continues to progress, NEFA girls of the future will (like Lushai girls) weave beautiful cloth, developed from the old designs, which they will wear in their own fashion. Some of the older ornaments too have a beauty that the most sophisticated young women need not despise.

The third point is that the problem of dress is only part of a much larger problem, the problem of decivilization as a whole. It is no good trying to preserve and develop tribal dress unless we are going to do the same for tribal institutions, tribal religion and tribal dance, song and art. The same attitude of respect for all good tribal things must run through every aspect of life. To this I shall return in the next chapter.

The final word was said by Tagore in the article already quoted. 'Is change,' he asks, 'to be ruled out altogether in the sphere of dress? Change is bound to come, but it follows the law of necessity, not the law of imitation; because imitation is very often opposed to necessity, it is not conducive to health or happiness or peace. It is out of keeping with its surroundings, it has to be achieved by effort and maintained with diligence.'

Tagore gives sound advice to anyone who wants to change his way of dress. "See that it harmonises with your way of life, your surroundings and the traditions of your country. Do not be led unthinkingly into imitation of what goes against the history, the sentiments and the taste of your own people. How far change can go without becoming imitation, it is difficult to say with certainty. But in general it may be said that it is assimilation where the thing borrowed harmonises with the things one has already, and that it is imitation where the thing adopted strikes one as incongruous."



## Chapter Five

### PSYCHOLOGICAL AIMS IN NEFA

*To my many good friends among the Chiefs and people, I have only one message. Guard the national soul of your race and never be tempted to despise your past. Therein, I believe, lies the real hope that your sons and daughters will one day make their own original contribution to knowledge and progress.*

—R. S. RATIKAV

#### *The Menace of the Inferiority Complex*

In the book, *Adam in Plumes*, already quoted, Colin Simpson makes an estimate of the effect of civilisation on primitive communities: 'Pride was going, pride in creation. And that I feel is the depressing thing that always follows on foreign contact: the tribesman feels that he and his works are, by comparison, second-rate. We bring him a new world of ideas, a new freedom from fear, new foods to grow, new sensations to enjoy, new ways to live more healthily; there is a big credit side. And on the debit side we bring him an inferiority complex.'

An inferiority complex is a dangerous thing; it poisons the sources of individual happiness, making a man abnormally sensitive, bitter and resentful. It is destructive of art and culture, causing people to despise their own ideas and customs and to regard their own creations as inferior. It can ruin the political relations between two communities, and in the tribal areas can disturb the friendly association of the hill people and the outside world.

In all the tribal areas, the danger of creating this sense of cultural and political inferiority is apparent. 'I am so ashamed of being a Konyak,' exclaimed a Konyak boy who had had a little education. One of the leading tribal interpreters in Tirap told me that he was so embarrassed at being called a 'Naga' (which actually he was not) that whenever he went down to the plains and mixed with other people, he described himself as Chinese.

The difference in the way he was treated, he said, was remarkable: at once he was given the respect and position that was denied him as a NEPA tribesman.

An Adi interpreter who once went to Delhi told me that he had been rebuffed there by a leading politician for appearing before him in a *kun-cloth*. 'When the great man said this to me,' he said, 'I thought I wasn't a human being at all. I felt that I was a monkey and my proper place was among the trees.' An Apa Tani used very similar words in describing his reactions to the magnificence of the buildings and personalities of the capital: 'they made me feel like a monkey of the hills.'

This sensitiveness is especially noticeable when parties of NEPA people, and indeed parties from any of the tribal areas, are brought from the interior to perform at dance festivals or to travel round India. In their own country they never pass anyone on the road without greeting him and exchanging a few words. In the villages there is a free and easy spirit of hospitality; you don't have to call on someone before being invited to his house. Everybody sits down to a meal together and there are no classes in tribal transport. It is therefore rather a shock for the tribesmen to be suddenly introduced to modern society, in which everybody lives in his own little individualistic world and only greets his friends, where every house is a self-contained castle, where people do not welcome strangers who drop in for a meal or a drink without warning, and where the railways carefully segregate those who can afford to pay air-conditioned, first-class and third-class fares. The tribesmen do not understand, and think that this odd behaviour, which the rest of us have come to accept as normal, is specially aimed at them.

There was a distressing incident at a Tribal Welfare Conference in a State in eastern India a year or two ago, when parties of dancers were brought long distances to entertain the delegates and, after being kept waiting for hours in the hot sun, with the most meagre amenities arranged for them, were told that they were improperly dressed and could not put on their show. The shock to the generous and simple tribal mind as a result of such treatment is incalculable.

Recently a party of Adi boys went on an educational tour of India. In one State capital they visited the Museum and were



shown life-size models of a few NEFA people and a number of old photographs, which seem to have been collected for the Calcutta Exhibition of 1883. In the fashion of the time, the models had atrocious countenances and were painted a pitch black; the photographer seems to have chosen the ugliest possible types to immortalise with his camera. The boys were naturally upset by this, for they felt that they were being ridiculed and misrepresented, as in fact they were in the eyes of the world. Matters were even worse in another Museum which I visited recently. In its Ethnographic Gallery similar life-size models were being prepared; but today not seventy-five years ago, which were as hideously ugly and of such an offensive colour as to give a wholly inaccurate picture to non-tribal and serious affront to tribal visitors. The Khams, who have an elaborate and colourful dancing attire, with wonderful ornaments, were represented by a down-at-heel couple, the man in a deplorable shirt and trousers, the woman ill-dressed (Kham women are often very pretty); and badly dressed. The Chenchus appeared as a pair of coal-black monstrosities; the Adis might have stepped straight out of the *Vikram Pitruva*; a 'Naga' with his hair-cut wrong looked more or less half-witted. The only really satisfactory exhibit was the Garo one, which was empty, as the model had not been finished.

Museum curators have to be very careful to ensure that their exhibits will create pride and not embarrassment in the tribal people who see them; they should show the best things of their art and life; they should display the finest specimens of tribal humanity; and they should try to be accurate in dress and ornament. Otherwise in Museums, which might do so much good, the tribal folk will only be depressed when they see themselves ugly, black and badly-dressed.

Another thing which inevitably has a bad effect on the tribal mind is the exhibition of Wild West films, which usually, though not (I am glad to say) always, show the triumph of 'civilisation' over the American Indian who fights for his land, his women and his hunting-rights, for 'this creature is very wicked: when attacked it defends itself'. The Indians of course are not entirely bad; there are usually a few high-minded characters who come over to the white man's side (pretty girls are particularly enlightened in this respect), and the whites are not all good, for there



is often some broken-down colonist who, inspired by love for the Indian Chief's daughter, sells the post and ends up before a firing squad. Films showing Indians in all their fiery falling before the bullets of the civilized exploiters of their land are, in my opinion, far more immoral than many of those banned by the Film Censors, for the westernized Khasi or Naga who sees them is likely either to identify the Indian with himself and the white man with the plannian, or the colonist with himself and the Indian with his 'wilder' brother of the interior. The first reaction naturally raises antagonism towards the non-tribal, the second may create a subconscious tendency towards the exploitation of the uneducated and simple, which is already a serious problem in some places.

These films have a bad effect too on the general public. I once went with an English woman, not a good representative of her tribe, to see a film on Africa. There was a sequence of a 'square' of British soldiers being attacked by Fungu-Wuzzies. The white troops used their guns with great effect and soon wiped out the natives, who were armed only with spears, tumbling them over in heaps of pathetic dead. 'Our splendid boys!' breathed the lady at my side.

Advertisers too sometimes use tribal themes. I remember a comic strip about somebody's cure for constipation, in which the hero was a corpulent and passive Naga Chief who was always cutting off his neighbours' heads, until he took the magic remedy which eased his bowels.

More and more of the tribal people are seeing such things and they suffer by them, for though they can laugh at themselves, they have not yet learnt to enjoy others laughing at them.

The inferiority complex is mainly developed in the educated or those who come into close contact with officers of the Administration and, even more, with the people of the plume. It is expressed in an exaggerated sensitiveness and a readiness to resent a slight; in a belief that all outsiders, and even our own officers, look down on them and despise their culture; and paradoxically in a desire to eliminate anything 'tribal' from their lives. Thus we have a growing attachment to European dress among the educated, the use of the sola tops which in villages is still the symbol of a higher culture, sometimes a refusal to join in the

dancers or songs, sometimes even the adoption of another religion. The inferiority complex is the knife that severs the link that binds the people to their past. If it continues to develop in the tribal areas it will destroy their art, culture and religion, for the people will not hold to something of which they have become ashamed, and it will lead to a collapse of moral sanctions and of the social organization which at present holds the tribes together.

A distinguished missionary, writing in *The Geographical Magazine* of the situation in the Gold Coast, has said: 'The source of much of the desperate frustration of Africa is a fundamental lack of faith in the contribution of the coloured people, not only on the part of the white folk, but among the Africans themselves. The fantastic technical success of modern, Western, man seems to dazzle the eyes of black and white alike that the European really assumes a similar superiority in all other spheres of life, and the African, bedevilled with self-doubt, seeks only to play a resentful second fiddle to the white man's tune. Whereby the world is much the poorer. For the tune we play is largely materialist, the atonal music of extreme individualism; it is the African contribution, if we would only hear it, which might restore to us a sense of the unseen world, and the wisdom of a richer communal relationship.'

Transfer this to India and it will serve as a serious warning of what may happen in the tribal areas here.

The fundamental objection to missionary effort, of whatever religion, or even of social reform work, is that it greatly increases self-doubt. By pouring scorn on traditional beliefs and customs, it creates a sense of inferiority even among those who refuse to become converts. To be told constantly that whatever is tribal is evil, or at least 'backward', produces frustration and despair.

This frustration may also lead to the wrong kind of detribalization. Desribalization of a kind and to some degree, as I have already pointed out, will be inevitable in certain cases. The boy who goes to the University, who will be trained up to be a future Superintending Engineer, Director of Health Services, or Advisor to the Governor, will certainly shed many of his tribal characteristics, he will wear whatever dress convention dictates at the time and live in the same style as officers from other parts of India. And this will do no harm, provided such detribalization



has come about naturally and not as a reaction against a deposed past or as a symptom of an inferiority complex.

But deracialization among the ordinary villagers who are continuing to live their own lives in their own homes (especially when their homes are in the wild and lonely frontier mountains) is destructive of art and culture and may easily lead to unhappiness and discontent. A boy or girl who has adopted western dress, learnt to despise the laws and rulers of his tribe, acquired a taste for 'modern' luxuries, finds life in an interior village intolerable. Caught between two worlds, at home is neither, this Homo Duplex rebels culturally against the one and politically against the other.

What causes this inferiority complex? The first and perhaps the chief reason for it is simply that we, the non-tribal people, are what we are. With the best will in the world, we are different and because we are different we are regarded as superior. There are a great many of us, and the more efficient we are, the more we develop our technological superiority, our military or semi-military power and our rapid advance, the more we tend to overwhelm the people of the hills. Laetadio Hearn used to talk of the danger of exterminating other races 'merely by modifying them—by monopolising and absorbing, almost without conscious effort, everything necessary to their happiness.'

A second cause is our general lack of adjustment to local conditions. It has been said of a tribal house that it seems to grow out of the landscape. Of how many officials, or social workers, and their wives, their dress, their houses, in the tribal areas, could it be said that they grow out of the landscape? Too much of their life is different, alien, contrived; they do not fit into the picture. The ultimate result of this may be to create a profound sense of inferiority among the local people or, at the least, to produce a small class of parasitical tribal 'middle' who will alienate themselves from their own civilisation. But the mass of the folk are not likely to do this and they may resent both the deracialised, who elsewhere have often taken the lead in exploiting their poorer and simpler brethren, and the unfamiliar presence of those who come to work among them.

This is a serious problem, and I will now examine the various ways in which the NEPA Administration is trying to solve it.



In the first place, it is attempting over a wide field an adaptation which will make the people feel more at home with the new institutions and officials who have come within their borders. Secondly, it has adapted a policy of treating tribal institutions not as rivals, but as allies, and of working through them. These techniques of adaptation and alliance apply to village government, education, architecture, dress, medicine and the personal approach to the hillmen.

But it is not enough to try merely to cure the inferiority complex or prevent it coming into being. We have not only to build up the people's pride in being themselves, but, more important still, to build up their pride in being Indians. As a result of their long isolation from it, they are only beginning to be conscious of the great country to which they belong and it is essential that this consciousness should grow into an enthusiastic devotion and a patriotic love.

From this point of view, every official is an ambassador and the frontier people's idea of India will largely depend on his behaviour. They will judge not by what they are told, but by what they see. India is becoming real to them, and if they can blend a pride in their own culture with a pride in the greater Indian culture of which it forms a part, they will be not only politically but psychologically integrated with the rest of the country. This task of emotional integration is of special importance in the remote areas along the international boundary. To such places we must bring the message that (in words attributed to the Lord Buddha himself): 'Colourful and rich is India, lovable and charming is the life of man.'

Along the frontier, high up in the mountain zones, in conditions of danger, hardship and loneliness, there is a chain of outposts staffed by men of great courage and perseverance. Some of these are checkpoints on the tracks leading to Tibet and Burma and many visitors come through them when the passes are open. They are merchants and pilgrims, as well as tribal people related to those within the Indian border. Many of them are simple folk, but some are men of education and substance. The aim of the checkpoints is not merely to keep a watch on visitors and control their movements. Each is a place which in its small way can display the message and character of India to people of other

countries. In some of them comfortable rest-houses for travellers will be constructed. Small gifts will be made to encourage the travellers on their way. Pictures and literature in the appropriate languages are provided and every effort is being made to ensure that visitors will feel that they are coming to a friendly land.

### *Techniques of Adaptation*

It is not easy for the town-dweller to adapt himself to the country or for sophisticated modern man to adjust himself to the hard and simple life of the tribes. But of all the different techniques of adaptation which we will consider, the first and most important applies to our own minds and hearts, a matter on which Mr Nehru has spoken frequently.

'We ought to be careful,' he has said, 'about appointing officers anywhere, but we must be doubly so when we appoint them in tribal areas. An officer in the tribal areas should not merely be a man who has passed an examination or gained some experience of routine work. He must be a man with enthusiasm, whose mind and even more so whose heart, understands the problem it is his duty to deal with. He must not go there just to sit in an office for a few hours a day and for the rest curse his fate for being sent to an out-of-the-way place. That type of man is completely useless. It is far better to send a totally uneducated man who has passed an examination, so long as he goes to these people with friendship and affection and lives as one of them. Such a man will produce better results than the brilliant intellectual who has no human understanding of the problem. The man who goes there as an officer must be prepared to share his life with the tribal folk. He must be prepared to enter their huts, talk to them, eat and smoke with them, live their lives and not consider himself superior or apart. Then only can he gain their confidence and respect, and thus be in a position to advise them.'

Senesano once said to me that: 'The entire policy of the Prime Minister with regard to the tribal people of India may be summed up in one word—Humility.' I believe that this is true. Humility has been the dominant virtue of the most successful administrators of tribal areas throughout the world.

Humility is not a popular virtue and is not generally supposed to pay a very high dividend; it can, if insincere, be one of the most obnoxious of human characteristics. But if it is sincere, it will enable us to approach our task without fear of failure, save



us from countless mistakes, and win us the true affection of many tribal friends.

This attitude expresses itself in very definite and practical ways. It is not expressed by keeping tribal visitors waiting for a long time outside one's house or office, and by not offering them seats. I once knew an official who was very full of his oneness with the people; they were his brothers and he loved them, he said, as if they were members of his own family. Yet I noticed that when it came to his arranging a community feast, he and his fellow-officers had chairs to sit on; school-teachers, instead of sitting with their children, collected in a little group by themselves; the tribal headmen and others sat on mats on the ground and were given inferior plates and dishes; the school-children did not even get mats, and the general public milled up somehow on the outskirts. It is still all too common, at any meeting between officials and the people, for the former to sit on chairs and the latter to squat on the ground. Could not everybody sit down together?

I once attended a party, not I am happy to say in NEPA, where two kinds of *pan* were provided; the better quality was handed to the officials and their wives, the inferior to the tribal guests.

Now let us admit frankly that it is very easy to talk about being dedicated to the tribes or loving them or being one with them. It sounds wonderful on paper, but it is by no means easy to carry out in practice. When an officer is first appointed, in the first flush of his enthusiasm everything seems simple, but as the years go by it becomes more difficult, for the tribal people are like people all over the world. Most of them are friendly, honest, hospitable, good, but just as anywhere else in the world, some of them are dishonest, mean, untrustful, treacherous. It is easy to love the friendly; it is not easy to put up with those who cheat or betray you and, in some cases, an official or social worker in the tribal areas, who has begun well, loses his enthusiasm and grows impatient with the people he is trying to serve. He becomes mentally hostile to them and feels that somehow he has been cheated. The hardships and loneliness of his life then begin to oppress him and what at first was a great adventure now becomes a rather dreary chore. This is why it is essential that we should not be inspired merely by romantic sentiment, but build



up within ourselves a store of inner strength, with an attitude based on knowledge and reason, so that when the testing days come we will not fail.

I once suggested a sort of anagram on the letters LEA.S.—'To Isolation Fearless, In Adversity Serene'. One of the things that helps towards the attainment of this serenity and steadfastness is the habit of reading, or the cultivation of some intellectual interest or hobby. Libraries have been opened in all the Divisional headquarters and there are arrangements for sending parcels of books to the outposts. The best administrators of tribal people are, generally speaking, men of wide general education, men who read and think. The study of poetry and art enables a man to appreciate many aspects of tribal life. The reading of great fiction enlarges his knowledge of human nature. Any intellectual hobby, the study of botany, of animals, birds or butterflies, stamp-collecting, photography, and above all, of course, the study of anthropology, psychology and folklore (for which he has so rich a field at his very doors) will keep him fresh and help to protect him against the perils of loneliness and the tenebrous of boredom.

Reading, in fact, should have its place in the life of every NEPA officer, and we may remember the example of the great scientist who spent at least half an hour every day of his life in reading poetry so that his spirit would not be overwhelmed by the accumulation of scientific data. Officials should not allow themselves, in the words of Matthew Arnold, to be entirely 'drugged with business'.

What are the qualities which the tribal people themselves, for they are the real Selection Board which passes the ultimate judgement, admire in an official or social worker?

The first is something which is rather hard to define, but is generally expressed by the words 'personality' or 'character'. The tribal people do not generally take to a negative person, someone who is dull, peevish or flat. They like a clubbable man, to use an expression of Dr Johnson's. This does not mean that they necessarily prefer a 'hearty' character to a quiet one, indeed some very successful officers have been on the quiet and gentle side. They like the real, the genuine, the sincere far more than the back-slogger. But an officer must not be too shy, or his reticence will be mistaken for pride. A warm, generous, affectionate, pessi-

ure, but not too effusive, character is best. But if one does not have these minimal characteristics, it is no good trying to put them on. The thing is to be simple and natural, oneself.

Then again the tribal people are admirers of men and women who work hard. Indeed, the capacity for work holds a high place in their ethical code, and they always condemn the slacker in their folk-tales. They criticize an officer who in his office or on tour does not fulfil his duties, of which they are becoming increasingly aware. They admire promptitude and punctuality in others even if they do not practise it themselves.

Many of them are strongly democratic, but others have a great respect for their Chiefs and for the aristocracy. They have a sense of genealogy and history. But both types are extremely sensitive to any assumption of superiority by outsiders. They like to feel that an officer is a person of position, authority and dignity, but at the same time they expect him to mix freely with them on terms of equality: they expect him to be always accessible.

They appreciate any genuine interest in their customs and traditions and respond readily to expressions of admiration for their textile and other arts. They are delighted when an officer puts on a tribal hat or coat, or if his wife wears one of their ornaments. Most of them like talking about themselves and appreciate an attentive hearing. They are apt to talk for a very long time, and patience is a virtue we have to cultivate.

In fact, patience and an even temper are qualities admired even by the most warlike tribes. They very strongly resent being shouted at or roughly treated. No one should ever, on any account whatever, strike or beat them. It is sometimes said that this is the best way of hating them, that they respect a 'man' who is not afraid of them, and that once they have been 'put in their place' they become devoted friends. My own experience is that such friendship is generally based on fear and that a blow is brooded over and resented for years.

To the tribal mind the family is one of the most important things in the world, and a married officer with his wife and children who can establish a real home among them, and show them something of the beauty of family life quickly finds himself accepted in tribal society.



The people expect an officer to act quickly and always fulfil his promises. They know nothing about red tape and, when they hear about it, think it very silly. This is why it is essential that there should be a certain flexibility in the financial and other rules governing work in the interior. 'Workers among the tribes', says Mr N. K. Ramanuj, who as a former Adviser for NEFA had wide experience of them, 'must be men of adventure and elastic intellect. The mind must be constantly on the alert to discover ways and means of overcoming the hundred and one problems of administration in such unusual areas and amongst such unusual people. The successful administrator will be ever experimenting. For it is through experiment that, in the last resort, the most practical solution can be found to the knottiest problems. And if only a small percentage of the experiments meet with success, it will be something gained. But the worker who plods along the beaten track, hesitant to undertake any venture lest it might not meet with immediate success, will be of little use for work in areas where the commonly accepted rules and practices are impractical of implementation and are a hindrance to the development and growth of the people.'

Very important to tribal psychology is the love of truth and a belief in justice. This is why sincerity in an officer is more important than academic or technical qualifications. The people expect him to tell them the truth even if it is unpleasant and nothing causes greater trouble than for him to make promises which he cannot fulfil. The frank, truth-speaking type is thus more likely to succeed than the glib, the smooth or the slick. The tribal people are becoming aware of the large sums of money now allocated for their benefit and are demanding a high standard of integrity in their officers. They may be profoundly disturbed by a discrepancy of only a few annas, which we may hardly notice.

For the puritan they have little use; they dislike anyone who preys and meddles, who is always wanting to do them good, never happy unless he is showing something up. Despite the harshness of their environment, they have a zest for living, an immense capacity for enjoyment; they are affirmative, positive people; and they expect their officials to enjoy life with them.

Puritanism does not have much chance in NEFA, but there are



other tribal areas where it is as great a menace to economic exploitation. For puritanism is a cowardly approach to life; it is afraid of happiness; it will not let boys and girls dance together; it discourages the traditional dances for fear they will lead to 'sin'; it clothes what a great philosopher has called the 'warm and breathing loveliness of human flesh' in ugly garments because it might excite 'desire'; it watches with jealous eyes the course of young love and the gastronomic conclusions of the aged. It is dangerous, for no wounds are so mortal as those inflicted by the unseen and persistent, and the moral side of a nation's life is above all else vulnerable to false opinion.

In 1869, T. H. Levein, a British soldier, who was entrusted with the administration of the Lushai Hills and became very popular there for his wise and friendly administration, made a remarkable statement which anticipated the attitude and policy of modern India towards the tribes.

'Let us not govern these hills for ourselves, but administer the country for the well-being and happiness of the people dwelling therein. What is wanted here is not measures but a man. Place over them an officer gifted with the power of rule, not a mere cog in the great wheel of government, but one tolerant of the failings of his fellow-creatures and yet prompt to see and recognise in them the touch of nature that makes the whole world kin, apt to enter into new trains of thought and to modify and adopt ideas, but cautious in offending national prejudice. Under a guidance like this, let the people by slow degree civilise themselves. With education open to them and yet moving under their own laws and customs, they will turn out not debased and miniature Europeans of England, but a new and noble type of God's creatures.'

### *The Importance of Words*

It is important to watch the way we talk, for words are the sacrament of thought. There is already a tradition about this and it is almost possible to recognise a NEFA officer by the kind of expressions he uses. Members of the NEFA staff do not, for example, use the word 'backward' to describe the tribal people. They have come to see that its use is inconsistent with their fundamental attitude, for it suggests that they are 'modern' and

advanced and their tribal friends are lagging behind. It implies a value-judgment, which the conscience of the world may yet reverse. For who is really backward—the honest peasant working in simplicity and truth among the hills, or the representative of modern progress entangled in the mad race for power and wealth, the symbol of whose achievement is the hydrogen bomb?

The word 'uplift' too has similar connotations; it is a patronising word, a benefactor's word, suggesting that we are stooping down to raise up those who are below us, ignorant and following evil ways. But no one should go to the tribal areas as a patron or reformer. The only thing in which the word 'uplift' should be applied is a bribe.

Other words to be avoided are 'betterment' and 'reform'. I once heard someone say that 'we must come down to the level of the tribals if we want to understand them'. It was the NEPA ideal that the speaker had not understood.

The tribal people are very sensitive to anything that smacks of condescension, and while using the right words will not ease us of the outlook of the patron or benefactor, it is a help towards gaining a proper approach.

### *The Tribal Councils*

An important means of delivering the tribal people from a sense of inferiority is to strengthen their own system of self-Government and to recognise and establish their own forms of jurisprudence and administration of justice.

Village Government varies considerably from tribe to tribe. The Nortes and Wanchoos are ruled by powerful Chiefs who do, however, consult the village elders and the priests on important matters. The Sherdukpons and Akas of Kameng are dominated by aristocratic families who still retain a good deal of power in their own hands, though they too work through some sort of village council. On the other hand, the Dailas, who generally regard the family or household rather than the village as the unit of society, have only slightly developed the council system, and the Idu Mishimis of the Dihang Valley, who have but recently come under regular administration, tend to substitute the blood-feud of revenge for legal process, though they have the Akhela council which is now being strengthened.



The councils of the Tangsa, although at one time well-entrenched today seem to have surrendered many of their functions.

On the other hand, the Adi Kolang, the Apa Tani Bulang and the Karam Midum Piarua are still of great authority and influence.

This is not the place to consider in detail the constitution and functions of these councils, but I will describe samples of them which will give some idea of what they are like and how they work.

Let us take the least organized first. The character of a village council reflects the social polity and psychology of its tribe. Dalla (Bangai) society is highly individualistic and, as I have said, the house in which a dozen related families may live is the real unit of society. Settlements are scattered in exceptionally wild and difficult country at a considerable distance from one another. This has not been favourable to the development of tribal institutions and Robinson, writing in 1851, speaks of the 'oligarchical' form of Dalla government and observes that 'the influence of the Chiefs seems to be mild in the extreme, the people's lives being ordered by 'a sort of tacit common-sense law'. The most important agents of this law are called Gunglungs, messengers or intermediaries, who in the old days used to arrange for the ransom of captives and still represent the parties in any dispute. They go to and fro in the interests of peace and compromise, and finally convene a council or Nele which consists of the people chiefly concerned, the Gunglungs, the local elders and official headmen. The council debates the matter in a very informal way and compensation is decided according to the wealth of the defendant. Oaths are taken and there are rituals to test a man's innocence or guilt.

On the other hand, the Apa Tani, with their closely knit co-operative social system, and villages in close proximity to one another, have developed a much more highly organized system of government, which Dr C. von Furer-Haimendorf described in 1944.

The representatives of the clan, who in their plurality constitute a kind of village government, are the Bulangs, men of character and ability, who are appointed either from among the members of a family which owing to its wealth and status always furnished one or two Bulangs, or on account of their personal influence in



the community. There are three types of Buliangs: the Akha Buliangs, old men past the time when they can take a very active part in the conduct of village affairs but with whom lies the ultimate decision in all important matters; the Yapa Buliangs, middle-aged men who carry on negotiations and sit in the village councils and who keep the Akha Buliangs informed of developments and place agreed settlements and disputes before them for sanction; and finally the Ajang Buliangs, young men who are employed as messengers, go-betweens and assistants of the Yapa Buliangs, and act as the leaders of the young generation.

The Buliangs are rewarded for their services in the community by ceremonial gifts of beer and meat on the occasion of village feasts and, during the Mjoka and annual festivals celebrated by the whole tribe, every Buliang receives gifts from his opposite member in the village standing in a relationship of ceremonial reciprocity to his own village or quarter.

Though the Buliangs are the arbiters of tribal law and the upholders of justice they are primarily the spokesmen of their own clan or clan-group and not village headmen with absolute authority. Their duties are not those of a police and they do not take action unless a dispute has become a public issue which must be dealt with by the community as a whole, be it by mediation or by the use of force.

Farré-Halmendorf considered that this system fulfilled 'a very valuable function in tribal life', and urged that Government should strengthen it and 'avoid any course of action which might detract from its influence and authority.'

Among the Sherdukpens, who have come very much under the influence of the plains, the council or Jang is led by the senior Thik Akhan (Jagatman), who is chosen by the villagers and whose appointment is ratified by Government which presents him with a red coat. His office is not hereditary and, though he usually holds office for life, he may be removed if he loses the confidence of his people. Other members are chosen by the villagers and must include the head of every household, the village watchman and the Kachang or messenger whose task is to summon people to meetings and act as a sort of executive official. The Jang, in addition to its judicial functions, looks after the village generally, arranges festivals, fixes dates for fishing or hunting expeditions,

undertakes the making of roads and bridges, and gives relief in case of need. In the larger settlements there is a special building where it conducts its proceedings.

The Mongpas, who have a strong sense of protocol, elect the Ghorings or leaders of their Langpa, as it is called, who hold office for life and are carefully graded in order of seniority. The other members are known as Thumtus and are changed every year. As among other tribes, the Langpa has wide powers and usually punishes by demanding compensation which may be partly used for feasts and sacrifices.

Tangsa society seems to be in a state of some decay. For example, in the past it had a barbettes' dormitory called the Loop-Pang, which fulfilled the functions of the Ming among the Norkas and Wandus. This has nearly disappeared, though there is still a girls' dormitory in some of the villages. Formerly too the Tangsa had a fully-constituted council of elders called by a number of different names, Khaphua, Khapong, Khapa, according to the dialect of the sub-tribe concerned. It consisted, as in other places, of the leading men of the village chosen for their wealth and character, and representing every clan. The leader was chosen in an informal manner by the villagers, but he was apparently usually selected from a clan which had the hereditary right to the post and the council met in his house. Its decisions were respected by everyone and, although it sometimes inflicted corporal punishment on an offender, it usually only punished by compensation. If anyone was unable to meet this he was kept in the custody of the head of the council, but his friends and relations could, as it were, bail him out by promising to pay within a certain time. Today these councils are not functioning properly and most minor disputes are settled by the official headmen, serious matters being submitted to the Administration.

The most highly developed and effective of all the tribal councils is the Ail Kelang, which may well become a model for the whole of NEFA. We are fortunate in having some very early accounts of it. For example, the explorer Wilcox, who visited the Ail country in 1825, describes the 'hall of audience and debate' where the Kelang met. He emphasises the fact that 'everyone has an equal vote', but notes that 'though not acknowledged by them it is evident that some few, either through their superior



wealth, hereditary esteem, or real ability, exert a very strong influence on the rest and can readily sway them to any measure.' This power, however, is kept in check by 'the extreme jealousy of the Raj and vigilant watchfulness to preserve their democratic rights.' He describes how a Chief summoned the people to a meeting with a series of shrill whoops and a long speech 'in an excited voice', while he never ceased beating his right foot on the ground.

Father Krick describes the meeting of a *Kibung* at Membo in 1853. There were six Chiefs, gorgeously attired, who sat down in a circle, right in the centre of a spacious hall. Speeches were made and the members cast their votes, the leading men withdrew to deliberate over their decision. 'Each village,' says Father Krick, 'is self-governing and independent. It has its own administration, both legislative and executive. Women have no share in the government: they cannot even set foot in the council-room.'

'Every male, reaching the age of reason, is by right active member of any assembly. Each commune is ruled by five or six Chiefs elected for life by the people; they control all affairs of greater importance. If any of them dies, his son, if capable, succeeds to his office, else he remains a common citizen, and another election supplies the vacancy.'

'Laws are framed by the people, sanctioned by the council, and promulgated by the president. Every decision is supposed to come from the people; the Chiefs have no right but to approve and enforce it. Hence, the people propose, the council sanctions, and the president promulgates.'

'Every evening, all the men gather in the spacious council-room to discuss the topics of the day, which means: (1) to inform one another of what has been seen or heard; (2) to discuss the political questions put forth by one of the Chiefs; (3) to settle what the village will do on the next day, for it is understood that no one is free to dispose of his time as he thinks fit; his daily work is cut out, discussed and officially decreed by the majority of the council. Hence, every evening, between 10 and 11 o'clock, boys are sent about the village shouting at the tops of their voices: "Tomorrow, tiger hunt! Tomorrow, fishing! Tomorrow, field-labour! Tomorrow, *gama*!" i.e., obligatory holiday.'

'These injunctions are obeyed to the letter, for this people is as law-abiding and respectful to the powers that be, as it is proud



of its liberty. To call a Pathan a slave is an insult that would make this proud mountaineer grasp his teeth and grasp at his bow.

The council-house is also used for extraordinary gatherings convoked to deal with a sudden emergency, such as was my arrival; sometimes, especially on rainy days, it is turned into a rendezvous of gossip and handiwork. Everybody takes his tools and passes the time as pleasantly and as usefully as he can.

The wife has her army on civic guard, composed of young men above 17 or 18. All of them, except the married men, sleep at the barracks.

Dalton, who visited the same village shortly afterwards, has given a lively account of a meeting of a Kechang and notes that apart from the seven Gams or headmen there seemed to be no clear agreement 'as to the individuals who just then constituted this august body.'

The Kechangs settle administrative matters, such as when and where to clear the forests and sow the seed, when to go on hunting or fishing expeditions, when and in what manner a festival will be performed and sacrifice offered. They have judicial powers and offenders of all kinds are brought before them and sentenced to various types of punishment. In addition, they have today what may be called development functions, and if a road is to be made, a bridge to be repaired, a school to be built, the matter is always considered in the Kechang.

Originally the Adi Kechang was largely dominated by the priests and shamans, and derived its authority from the supernatural sanctions that they were able to invoke. It was firmly rooted in custom and tradition and had wide authority over every aspect of Adi life.

During the British days it was to some extent transformed. Official Gams, as the headmen are called in Sams, were appointed, one for every clan in a village. They were not paid anything, but were given red coats and, being recognised by Government, gained a certain amount of authority. These appointments changed the Kechang to some extent, for they naturally became members and caused the authority of the priests to decline. They introduced an official element that had previously been absent. But the Adi Kechang still remains a very informal body which

can be attended by any persons of influence. It is, in fact, essentially a court of the people. 'The people propose, the council sanctions, and the president promulgates.'



A woman gives evidence at a meeting of an Adi council

Even before Independence, a more elaborate institution known as the *Bungo* was introduced under official inspiration. The *Bungo* represents a number of villages and is attended by at least one leading *Gum* from each. It is mainly concerned in settling inter-village disputes. It is rather more fully organized than the village *Kebang*, for it has a 'secretary' and it maintains funds. Today a much larger unit, which might almost be described as the *Adi* Parliament, for all the *Adi* groups, has come into being. This is called the *Boguna Bokang* which can be attended by the leading men of all of the *Adi* groups in Siapa. This not only deals with inter-village disputes, but also takes up important questions of development.

The chief difference between the older councils and the modern *Bungo* or *Boguna Bokang* is that the latter do not have the same supernatural or social authority. They are more sophisticated and



official and already we find minutes being kept and resolutions typed out in English and forwarded to the Administration. This here is the beginning of a modern political organization which must certainly be guided and encouraged.

The Kaiman Mishini Phtal is not unlike the Kehang, but as might be expected in so individualistic a society, its authority depends very largely on the personality of the Chief who is its leading member. There are spheres of jurisdiction for all normal disputes, but when there is any matter of unusual difficulty or when the parties cannot come to an agreement, they go to any Chief who is generally regarded as having the greatest wisdom and influence. The Ramos and Pafiles have a similar system; their Ombus are respected elders who are widely consulted for the settlement of disputes.

In spite of certain differences, particularly differences in the degree of development and the authority of the councils in different tribes, certain things are common to them.

They all derive their authority from ancient times and the fact that they are the expression of the will and power of the whole people. They are supported not only by social, but also by supernatural, sanctions and to give false evidence, for example, may call down the vengeance of the gods as well as excite the scorn of men. Sacrifices are commonly offered to avert supernatural dangers, to invoke the divine blessing on the council's deliberations, and to bring peace between the contending parties.

Most of the councils are informal in character. Although certain leading individuals are always recognized as members and among these now are included, as a matter of routine, the officially appointed headmen who are issued with red coats, the membership is left fairly vague. Anyone, unless he is excommunicate, can attend and speak, though there are some tribes such as the Dallas who do not seem to allow their women to do so. Decisions are taken, not by a formal vote, but by general agreement.

All the councils have judicial as well as administrative and development functions, though the latter are more elaborated in some tribes than others.

Some tribes have what may be called a junior branch of the council. The Ajang Bulangs of the Apa Tani, the Moshup or Dene boys of the Adla, the Moshung boys of the Wanchos and



Noctes have always played an important part in looking after their villages, maintaining paths, helping in cultivation, providing a sort of relief service; the Adis have a sort of fire-protection unit, staffed by these boys. Instead of introducing Farmers' Clubs or Youth Organisations, the Administration is bringing the existing institutions into closer union with the councils, so that their services can be utilised more effectively for village development.

The tribal councils have great potentialities. Established in history and tradition, supported by social and religious sanctions, expression of a genuine democracy representing the co-operative and communal temperament of the people, they can be used not only to establish law and order but also to further progress throughout NEFA. Although in the past, as I shall show immediately, they sometimes inflicted ferocious punishments which, after all, only reflected the kind of life they were living at the time, they have shown in recent years that they are capable of humanity, justice and common sense.

#### *Tribal Ideas of Guilt and Punishment*

Ideas of guilt vary greatly in different societies. A writer in *The New Statesman* has pointed out that to the American Indian the most important psychological factor is shame rather than a sense of guilt, and the real sanction against crime is the fear of being despised rather than the dread of punishment. This can be so strong that once an Indian, alone in his canoe in the middle of a lake, was so ashamed at breaking his paddle that he committed suicide for fear of being ridiculed. In Polynesia, on the other hand, the fundamental sanction is pride, and behaviour is dictated by the approval of the community. In Japan again it is not individual guilt but group guilt that is important. A father may commit suicide because the family has been put to shame, a teacher because his school with a picture of the Emperor has been burnt down. In none of these examples does self-reproachful guilt play a part, as it does in western cultures. Ethics, in fact, can have many different motivations and still remain a powerful force for the direction of human behaviour. We have, therefore, to be careful of what has been called Psychiatric Imperialism, which would mean imposing our own ideas of guilt and punishment on the tribal people.

In NEFA a husband who kills a man who has committed adultery with his wife may not feel guilty at all; he has done what any honourable man would do and he would feel guilty if he had been complacent. On the other hand, the crime of clan-incest, to have sexual relations with a woman of the same clan even if she is not a relative in the conventional sense at all, is a most serious offence. Yet it does not arise at all in modern society. The breach of a taboo which may bring the entire community into danger is another major social crime and imposes a heavy burden of guilt on the offender. In the same way a Protestant Christian who failed to keep Sunday in the seventeenth century not only felt guilty but might be put in the stocks as punishment, though today his descendants will spend the whole of Sunday playing golf and going to the cinema without a quiver of conscience.

Another way in which the tribal attitude to crime differs from our own is that in many cases responsibility rests upon the family, clan or village just as much as on the individual. Dalavi noted this as long ago as 1855. 'The crime of an individual is treated as a public disgrace to be atoned for by all. The culprit has eventually to bear the expense of this; it may therefore be regarded as a fine; but the process of realization is a most singular one. Suppose it is decreed that in expiation of the offence a pig is to be sacrificed; the Raj, that is the community, appropriate for the purpose the fine animal of the kind, in good condition, and private property that comes to hand. The owner is at liberty then to fix his own value upon it, and recover as best he can from the culprit. It may be said that it would have been simpler to have proceeded in the first instance against the property of the offender, but where all are judges, who will condescend to act as a mere Sheriff's officer? The system adopted provides an executive without any trouble to the Raj or expense to the State.'

Even today if a man, guilty of an offence, cannot pay the compensation demanded, his clansmen may club together to pay it, not so much out of kindness but because the other party may penalize them equally with the actual offender. It was formerly a common practice in a case of murder for the clansmen of the unperpetrated man to kill any member of the murderer's clan, or if the compensation imposed by a council was not paid, to capture



any fellow-clanman of the accused and held him as a hostage against payment. So closely knit are the people by social and economic ties and so strong is the feeling, however vague, of some kind of corporate spiritual power in a village that the crime of one is often regarded as the crime of all.

In the past, the punishments imposed by the council were severe. The simplest and most primitive was the retaliatory raid. Should anyone steal a mithun or commit murder, the offended villagers or clan-folk would raid the offending village, capture mithuns, burn the houses and carry off men, women and children as slaves. Similarly, blood-deads might be instituted and these have sometimes lasted for ten or twelve generations.

Capital punishment was commonly inflicted in former days when, it must be remembered, human life in the wild frontier mountains was not held of very great account. For example, Butler records of the Mahla in 1847 that although for all heinous crimes remission was procurable by the liquidation of a fine, 'adultery, if the husband was not privy to the offence, was punished by death which was inflicted by the people purposely assembled for the purpose.' Of the same tribe Cooper recorded a few years later that 'the laws which regulate their social system are simple but most effective. In the case of a murder a council of Chiefs is held and on proof of guilt the nearest male relative runs up the culprit at pleasure or takes heavy compensation.' The Apa Tani commonly passed the capital sentence on murderers, adulterers and thieves. Even in comparatively recent times I have recorded a similar punishment for theft. Theft is not very common, for quite apart from the fundamentally honest character of the people, there is not much point of stealing things in a village community where nothing can be hid. But there have been cases where very poor men have stolen mithuns to offer in sacrifice and there have also been examples of what appear to be some kind of kleptomania, for which severe punishments have been meted, often by members of the offender's own clan or family, who have felt humiliated by the disgrace brought upon them, and outraged by the fines to the payment of which they have had to contribute.

There are also other forms of physical punishment. Boys and girls may be chastised and at one time the accepted penalty for a girl who was constantly immoral was to strip her naked, tie her



to a tree and beat her. At one time the Daffas put an unfaithful wife in the stocks, beat her and mutilated her private parts; the labor in the remoter valleys cut off her fingers.

Some form of confinement was also common in the old days, particularly in Solumari. Dalton records in 1845 that 'the adulterer is seized and securely bound, detained under most rigorous treatment for a day or two. If he be powerful his friends come to his assistance, and make offers for his ransom which must be considerable to be accepted; but the chances are, he is left to his fate, and if such be the case he is put to death. The woman who has committed the *four pas* is less severely dealt with. A little wholesome chastisement, and she is again admitted into the family circle.'

The Apa Tanis and Daffas often put captives in the stocks or shut them up within a high palisade. Indeed, all the tribes used to confine hostages, prisoners of war and offenders against society.

If a man could not pay the compensation demanded by the tribal council, he might be taken by the complainant as a slave and many slaves today are descendants of people who lost their social position in this manner.

The fear of humiliation has always been a powerful deterrent. Immoral girls had their hair cut off, though I have never recorded a case of the cutting of the nose, which is still an unknown in other parts of India. She might be stripped naked and paraded round the village. Furer-Haimendorf describes a singular procedure by which a wealthy man who felt his honour had been insulted could vindicate himself and humiliate his enemy. This was called *Laulu* and involved the cruel destruction of wealth. A man who challenges a co-villager to a *Laulu* competition starts by killing one or several of his mithuns in front of his opponent's house and leaving the meat for the other villagers to eat. Sometimes he adds to the hobnob with valuable such as Tibetan bells, bronze plates and swords. If his opponent accepts the challenge he must slaughter at least the same number of mithuns and destroy property of equal value in front of the challenger's house. The next move is that the latter kills an even greater number of mithuns and this number must again be matched by his rival. The competition may go on until both parties are nearly ruined, but in theory the man who can continue longer with this destruc-

tion of property went thereby his opponent's entire property in land and movable possessions.

Excommunication is a serious weapon in the hands of a council, for a man or woman who is excommunicated (he is called, for example, *Mijak* by the *Adis* and *Maniboom* by the *Kaman Maliana*) cannot claim any of the normal privileges of his tribe. His daughters are not accepted in marriage by the other clans, he cannot get brides for his sons; the neighbours will not accept rice-beer from his hands. There have been cases where women who have gone wrong with outsiders and have conceived by them, have received no help of any kind at the time of delivery and I know of an instance where a girl died in child-birth as a result.

Threats of supernatural punishment were not unknown. For example, not long ago, there was an *Ashing* girl who left her husband for another man. The *Kebang* allowed some of the younger men to cut off her hair and mix some of it in rice-beer. They told the girl that they were going to drink the beer and that since her 'soul' was in the hair, she would be bound to die. This frightened her so much that she went back to her husband. It is also believed that the victim's ghost may return to reveal in dreams the identity of his murderer: I recently recorded a case in northern *Sing* where such a dream led to the discovery of a hidden corpse and the conviction of the murderer. Priests and shamans are believed to have the power of tracking down thieves and recovering stolen property by divination.

But the most common way of settling disputes or punishing crime has always been by multiple restitution. If anyone stole a mithun and was discovered, as he usually was, he was compelled to restore the original mithun or its equivalent and give another mithun as compensation. He also had to assist in providing food and beer for the members of the council who tried his case, and he often had to provide animals for sacrifice. This system applied to almost every kind of offence and in some cases the amount of restitution was worked out in considerable detail. Among the *Dallas*, for instance, if a man was found guilty of adultery he had to give one mithun for the act of intercourse, a wored bell for fondling the breasts, and a pig for a ceremony which would re-establish regular relations between the offended husband and his wife.



The same tribe inflicts a similar type of multiple restitution in the case of theft from a granary. The thief must restore the stolen goods and pay a mithun in compensation for the act of stealing. For cutting the rope of the door he must give a Tibetan dao and for opening the door a string of beads. Quite recently in the Bangru area of Kamsang a Nole was held to try a case of murder. Before the proceedings commenced a case was sacrificed for a Pado ceremony to bring peace and destroy hatred. The amount of compensation payable for the murder was very carefully computed. For the murder itself a male and a female slave were demanded. But this being disallowed, three mithuns were given instead of the man and two mithuns for the woman. Then three sacred bells were given for the victim's head, heart and buttocks respectively, a dao for his ribs, a valuable bead for his eyes, and mithuns and sacred bells to various relatives to make up for the fact that they could not enjoy his company any longer. Another mithun had to be produced for a second Pado sacrifice at the end of the proceedings, and an iron tripod was given to the village priest to drive away any evil spirit that might trouble the participants in the case. In all Bangru or Dulla councils the amount of compensation required is assessed by means of small bamboo sticks, which are finally buried with invocations to the gods to maintain goodwill and friendship. On this occasion the elders of the two villages concerned took an oath on the jaw of a large fish and a piece of iron that they would in future keep the peace.

These examples are typical of the customs observed by all the other tribes who have generally been willing to compromise even a case of murder, provided sufficient compensation was paid. In many cases the compensation demanded was so heavy that the offender was completely ruined and his fellow-tribemen had to help him out.

Today, under the harmonising influence of the Administration, the savage punishments of former days have almost entirely disappeared and the universal custom is for the councils to demand compensation for every type of offence.

How far can such compensation be regarded as a real deterrent against crime? Is there any danger that rich men will be inclined to commit crimes which they know they can afford? Or will a





*A Pailibo in the extreme north of Siang*



An Aka youth of Kaineng

rich and powerful clan commit crimes against a weaker clan knowing that it will be able to meet the expense of restitution without great difficulty?

Pride and self-esteem is a powerful psychological force in NEFA; it is the reason for the great feasts on which men spend the savings of many years. It is behind the impulse to display in a house the horns of every animal sacrificed or killed. The system of compensation is thus well-founded, for the offender not only suffers materially (and since most of the NEFA people are keen businessmen, he does not like this), but his pride receives a severe blow and he is put to shame. Deprived of his previous influence, he is unable to lead his neighbours and his social status is lowered accordingly; he is unable to offer the prescribed sacrifices to the gods if anyone in his family falls ill; it is difficult for him to open new areas for cultivation, since he is unable to sacrifice to the gods of the hill and forest and has to beg his neighbours to help him. I think it is probably true that this loss of face is often a more deterrent punishment than going to jail. In practice also the tribal councils adjust the amount of compensation to the status and wealth of an accused. They can be very merciful to a poor man, but they do not hesitate to make a rich man pay heavily for his fault. The councils also take into account all the circumstances of an offence and, if there are mitigating factors, they reduce the amount of compensation they demand.

The fear of humiliation extends even beyond the grave. Tribal exhumology does not reward or punish in the afterlife: you do not go to heaven for being good or to hell for being wicked. A man's status in another world reflects his status in this. However cruel and oppressive he may have been, if he has been rich here, he will have a good house and many possessions there. If he has had slaves and servants in this life, he will also have them in the next. The ghost of a warrior will be as respected after his death as he himself was admired during life. On the other hand, a poor man will remain poor after death and an insignificant person of no position in his village will be regarded without respect in the land of shadows; this is one reason why it is not easy to abolish slavery, for the owners fear that their ghosts will be unattended and without honour in the other world if they give up their slaves.



This belief certainly means that if a rich man commits a crime and has to pay many or all of his wealth in compensation, it will react seriously on his position in the other world, and this, curious as it may appear to us, is a real deterrent against crime.

An important aspect of this system is that, at the close of a council meeting, it is a common practice to offer sacrifices intended to keep the peace between the disputing parties. Such a ceremony is called *Pabe* in Subaniri, *Puffe* in eastern Kananag and has other names in different Divisions. This involves the offender in still greater deterrent expense, but at the same time it brings complainant and defendant together in a common feast and in many cases does restore friendly relations between them. There is also a system in Subaniri of inter-village pacts or treaties called *Dape*, intended to bring about the same result between whole communities that are involved in quarrels.

A still further deterrent is the necessity of offering sacrifice in a case of theft to persuade the 'soul' of the article stolen to return to it. In the more serious case of homicide, a murderer, even after he has paid full compensation, may have to offer sacrifices to the ghost of his victim which may otherwise attack him or members of his family and clan with sickness.

The advantage of a system of compensation or restitution is that it does not involve sending anyone to jail, with the almost inevitable corruption which this involves; it inflicts a serious material and psychological penalty on the offender, and justice is speedy, on the spot and visible to all. Yet it does not make him an outcast from society or deprive the village community of his services.

The total impact of the various forms of expenditure should be sufficient to deter any would-be criminal and in actual practice, the amount of crime in NEFA is comparatively small.

### *The Councils and the Law*

Where the local authority is well developed and its judicial decisions are respected and obeyed, where the same authority has administrative functions and at least the potentiality of becoming an agent for the development of its area, there is every reason to strengthen it.

Indirect Rule, as Furer-Haimundoff points out, 'as a system of Government based on indigenous institutions and the existing tribal authority has proved its worth in many parts of Africa, not only in places where the old order has never been disturbed by more direct methods of administration, but even in those parts where tribal institutions have long been disregarded and have had to be revived by newly investing with powers the old legitimate rulers.' And Malinowski too, with characteristic realism, says that 'the motives which move a European administration to introduce Indirect Rule are partly those of expediency and efficiency and partly enlightened liberalism. It is cheap, it is practical and it promises to produce a minimum of friction and dissatisfaction, for it involves rule with the consent of the majority of those governed, and the maintenance of as much as possible of the native authority instead of its destruction.'

In NEPA we have other motives also. Indirect Rule is an expression of our respect for tribal institutions and our faith in the good-sense, justice and fundamental humanity of the tribal people. It is also an expression of our desire to save the tribes from the complications and expense of systems of law for which they are not prepared and which they cannot understand.

In other parts of tribal India nothing has been more destructive of the high and simple standards of the tribesmen and their belief in human nature than their relations with the courts and lawyers. Their contact with the ordinary law has led to nervous and moral exhaustion, and the effect of the ordinary processes of the courts has been uniformly bad, even on people who have been in the process of acculturation for a hundred years. I will quote the opinion of a British administrator (Forsyth); it was written in 1871 of the situation in the Central Provinces, but it may still serve a warning to us today.

'Our administration of civil justice, while perhaps sufficiently suited to the requirements of settled districts, is practically a negation of all justice to the aborigine in his jungle. The courts sit at distant stations; and in the Central Provinces there is even a rule prohibiting the trial of cases by civil officers on tour, unless both parties live on the spot. It wants only the slightest acquaintance with the timid and suspicious aborigine to see that this really amounts to denying him a hearing altogether. He will never come to the station if he can avoid it by any payment within his



means to make, and, if he does, the chances are against his succeeding in escaping from it, and the crowd of harpies who cleave the wheels of justice, without leaving behind him much of his worldly substance.

'Legislation has never yet enabled an inferior to stand before a superior race; but it has frequently done much to put a weapon in the hands of the aggressors without which the invaded might have held their own.

'The aborigine is the most truthful of beings, and rarely denies either a money obligation or a crime really chargeable against him. When brought into court he will stand on one leg, and holding his ears in his hands in token of submission, freely confess to having battered in a rival's head with his axe. But he has no idea of letters; and so long as his admission of having signed a bond is held to prove against him all the obligations that it may contain, he will continue to be cheated by the man of the pen with whom he deals.

'In fine, our system is too sharp and swift for these people. It is death to the honest, timid and uneducated aboriginal.'

In a striking passage, all the more significant because it was written by Englishmen themselves, Thompson and Garratt describe the causes and results of the Santal Rebellion in their *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*.

'Inside India the Santal rebellion, 1855, at the time was taken as a portent, and aroused much of the alarm and savagery of repression which were to blast our law less than two years later. The Santals, aborigines who in a state of nature live by the chase, a people of extreme simplicity and homelike, were suffering (as they continue to suffer) from Hindu infiltration.

'This meant change of habits and a whole train of perplexities. Their lands became alienated, they were entangled in debts to people far cleverer than themselves. They were under foolish local officials, who would not help them. The facile reply that the Santals should appeal to the civil courts, or prove their charges of oppression before the criminal courts, was the answer of the father who should offer his son a stone when he asked for bread.

'No one dreamed of instruction by a race so gentle and industrious with courts of justice ever open to them; moreover, courts of British justice—which are open to everyone (like the Savoy Hotel). Planters, who were having trouble with the Bengalis praised them "laxative and patient" people; railway contractors delighted in them.



Then, without warning, a Santal inundation swept over the outlying regions of Bengal, reaching to within a hundred miles of Calcutta, clearing open skulls of European and Indian alike, pouring out poisoned arrows, burning huts and bungalows. All ended, however, as it was bound to end, in massacre and extermination.

The blood of the martyrs—if we may for a minute forget their wrong-doing and remember only that except by such an outbreak no redress could ever have come to them—proved the seed of better conditions. Their land was made into a non-regulation district, and they shared with the Punjab the privilege of exemption from the blessings of police as dispensed in the two courts, experiencing in their stead unsight-forward protection.

Throughout NEFA the tribal councils work within the general framework of the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation of 1945, which recognizes their importance and authority and gives them many powers. In the thirteen years since it was enacted, circumstances have greatly changed, but it has given an opportunity to the councils to prove themselves and show that they can, in the main, use their powers wisely and according to the new ideas of equality, humanity and order that have spread rapidly all over NEFA. Moreover, as I have already said, they have developed other than legal functions and, if they are strengthened, will in future play an increasing part in development activities.

Put very simply, the Regulation of 1945 provides that criminal justice shall be administered by the Political Officer, the Assistant Political Officers and the village authorities, all of whom are recognized as competent administrators of the law. It gives power to the councils to try a number of criminal offences such as theft, simple hurt, criminal or house trespass and assault, and to impose fines not exceeding Rs. 50 for them, as well as to award payment in compensation to the extent of the injury sustained. The councils also have civil powers and can try all suits without limit of value in which both the parties are indigenous to the tract.

The Regulation provides for appeals in appropriate cases and lays down that the Political Officers shall be guided by the spirit, but shall not be bound by the letter, of the Code of Civil Procedure. An important Section lays down that no pleader shall be allowed to appear in any case before the village authorities.

This Regulation does, in fact, give the tribal councils very wide powers, for it is recognized that they will function and inflict punishment or order compensation according to their customary law. Since, according to custom and tradition, even crimes like murder, kidnapping and rape can be satisfied by payment of compensation, it is possible to bring almost every kind of offence (except those committed against the State) within their jurisdiction. This will also extend to non-tribesmen who are involved in disputes with or offences against the tribal people; if, for example, an official is accused of adultery with a tribal woman, he will have to appear before the village council and accept its decision, irrespective of any departmental action that may subsequently be taken against him. Where tribesmen are accused by non-tribesmen, their cases will be heard by the village councils, except in the immediate neighbourhood of the Divisional headquarters.

The 1945 Regulation has already limited this type of 'punishment' that can be inflicted, and in fact the heavy punishments of former days have already almost entirely disappeared. Girls may still have their hair cut for immorality, but they are no longer stripped naked and beaten. Offenders are no longer buried alive, rolled over cliffs, or pushed into rivers to drown; already, of their own accord, the people have adopted the system of compensation, which in practice is adjusted to the wealth and position of the accused.

The policy of the Administration is to accept this situation and to strengthen the councils and work through them. Where an autocratic system has previously existed, it is trying to associate with the Chief a number of elders and give them a stronger voice in village affairs. Where the council's authority is weak, it is teaching the people how to develop it and make it more effective.

Great care, however, is being taken not to over-administer the councils and make them conform to our own idea of what they, with regular membership, codified laws, resolutions, minutes and so on, should be. But in some areas, where funds are placed at their disposal, there will have to be some sort of organization, though this will be kept as simple as possible. For training the councils, and also to impress on the people the Administration's concern for law and order, whenever they have to try a case of



serious crime, an official arranges to be present, but only to help and not to control the proceedings.

The 1945 Regulation lays down that 'the proceedings of the village authority need not be recorded in writing', but that the Administration may require it to report its proceedings in any way which appears suitable. The decisions are nowadays reported to the nearest local official, who records them if he is satisfied that the compensation demanded is just. If he is not satisfied, he demits the case to the council for further consideration, and if he is even then dissatisfied he sends it to the Political Officer for a final decision.

Under the Regulation, the Political Officers have wide criminal and civil powers, though in civil cases they are required 'in every case in which both parties are indigenous to the tract to endeavour to persuade them to submit to arbitration' by the village council. In practice, therefore, the main task of the Political Officers is to settle these cases, some of them fifteen to twenty years old, where the parties liable have refused to pay the compensation imposed on them by the councils. These, in an area where responsibility is so often corporate rather than individual, are usually highly complicated and demand in the official staff a profound knowledge of local custom and the utmost sympathy and patience.

In the sphere of development the value of the councils has frequently been proved. The people naturally take much greater interest in any project if it has been considered by themselves rather than imposed upon them, and in future, as they become more accustomed to the responsible use of money and to wise planning, more and more responsibility for development will be transferred from officialdom to the tribal bodies. There can be no doubt that this will do a great deal to give the people self-confidence, to make them feel that they are masters of their own destiny and that nothing is being imposed upon them, and to forward true progress throughout the hills.

This policy, in fact, holds an important place in the nation-wide programme of community development which aims at restoring to the village panchayat the authority and dignity it had in former days. 'The foundation of any democratic structure in India,' says Mr V. T. Krishnamachari, 'must be in the village, which is the oldest unit known in the country and has survived through



'many centuries.' He quotes Sir Charles Metcalfe, who wrote of 'the little republics having nearly everything they want within themselves, and almost independent of foreign relations; they seem to last where nothing else lasts. This union of the village communities, each one forming a separate little State in itself is in a high degree conducive to their happiness, and to the enjoyment of a great portion of freedom and independence.' Mr Krishnamachari goes on to say that in spite of the factions, caste tyranny and stagnation which undoubtedly existed, it was 'owing to the life in the village communities and the measure of autonomy they enjoyed, that we achieved social cohesion and stability and succeeded in preserving our traditional cultural values over many centuries. This survival of our values during long periods of foreign dependence is certainly due to the continuity of the village organization. We must, therefore, recognize that modern democratic government can have a solid foundation only in village democracy.'

### *A Touch of Healing*

Some time ago Mr Nehru, discussing the hatreds and fears that divide mankind, said that 'a touch of healing' was needed in international relationships. It is this touch of healing which the NEFA Administration hopes to bring to the punishment of crime, when it has to punish, in its acts. Mahatma Gandhi once said what indeed is being accepted by thoughtful people throughout the world:

'All criminals should be treated as patients and a jail should be a hospital for their treatment and cure. No one commits crime for the fun of it. It is a sign of a diseased mind. The causes of the particular disease should be investigated and removed. The outlook of the jail staff should be that of physicians in a hospital. The prisoners should feel that the officials are their friends who are there to help them to regain their mental health and not to harm them in any way.'

It may well be asked here, in view of the policy outlined in the preceding pages, it will be necessary for the Administration to inflict punishments at all. The answer is that, while the great majority of cases will be handled by the village councils and settled on a basis of reparation, there do occur offences against

the State; inter-village crimes, crimes at Divisional headquarters and occasions where bad tribesmen refuse to accept the authority of the tribal tradition. It is thus necessary to teach respect for the law; tribal people whose idea of social duties has hitherto, in some cases, extended only to their own village or their own tribe, have to realize their obligations to society as a whole; there must be some ultimate sanction to support the council; and tribal society itself must feel that justice is done to those who persistently offend against the principles of law and order.

But these aims are to be fulfilled against a background of compassion and understanding of human and tribal needs. A former Chief Justice of India, asked to describe the philosophy which is the basis of modern conceptions of crime and punishment, declared:

'First and foremost it is a philosophy based upon the recognition of human personality because that is the fundamental conception and covers all the rest. It is the feeling that every man, however wicked, however obstinate, however depraved, is nevertheless a human being with rights which he can never forfeit entirely, whatever he has done. Next comes the conception of social justice, that is to say, the claim of the community to protect itself, but with an obligation always to remember that the person against whom it seeks protection is one of its own members and is not to be treated as an outlaw or an outcast. And lastly there is the faith, often shaken but never shattered, in the common humanity of us all, that faith which has so often inspired great saints and prophets but which has scarcely until the present age captured the belief or excited the imagination of the great mass of mankind. I remember very well in the old days, when I heard a judge passing sentence and telling the prisoner, as judges sometimes will, that society must be protected against persons such as he, wondering whether a prisoner would ever ask in his turn, "But who is going to protect me against society?" Society may create criminals as well as punish them, and will continue to do so until it has accepted in full the philosophy of which I have just spoken.'

Such a philosophy, which is so close to the philosophy whereby the NEFA Administration tries to conduct its general affairs, is of special importance in those comparatively rare instances where a tribesman has to be put in jail. We have discussed the tribal ideas of guilt and conception of punishment, and although traditionally executions and confinement were not alien to them, they



were very different to those imposed by the law of the land. If a tribesman was confined by a hostile clan, he may have been very uncomfortable, probably more uncomfortable than he would have been in an ordinary prison, but at least he was among his own sort of people. He was in his own country; his captors spoke the same language; he was given the food to which he was accustomed; he lived under the same climatic conditions; he was only kept a short time; and there was always the hope of getting free. Even when the punishment was death, it was often inflicted in the heat of battle or suddenly in an ambush; the victim could hit back, he had a chance. This was very different to the cold-blooded and scientific treatment that a man receives in an official jail.

To lock a tribesman up in prison, therefore, is to subject him to an ordeal for which little in his tradition or experience has prepared him. His free and independent spirit suffers not only from incarceration, but also (in the ordinary prisons of the plains) from the unfamiliar food, the difficulty of communication with the staff who are unlikely to know his language, and the unaccustomed heat. When we add to this the fact that such imprisonment brings the hillman, who in many cases has a fundamentally innocent outlook on life, into touch with professional and hardened criminals, as well as political prisoners, the danger is obvious.

Writers on penal reform have urged that the best way of reforming prisons is to put fewer people in prison. Young delinquents in England for example, are now being put in hostels rather than in Borstal institutions, and in NEFA, if the Administration's policy succeeds, there will be comparatively few offenders who have to go to jail.

But there will be exceptional cases of persons who are a danger to society or the State, incorrigible and rebellious tribesmen who refuse to accept the customary laws, and these will have to be punished according to the normal procedure. This to ensure that the impact of this experience will have the least harmful result, the Administration is establishing a Social Rehabilitation Centre or Sadhar Ketutra, as we are calling it, where the touch of healing may be applied to those who have gone astray. We are not going to call it a 'jail' either on the files or in conversation; we will follow the example of Britain's most modern prisons in abolishing



such titles as 'Jailer' and 'Warder'. A specially trained officer will be appointed to look after it. He will be assisted by interpreters to ensure free communication, and by craft and agricultural instructors who will fill the days with useful and interesting work, for which some payment will be made in order to foster the prisoners' self-respect and enable them to purchase small comforts or send help to their homes.

In Italy jails are set in surrounding of natural beauty, and the NEPA Sudhar Kendra will be built at Tem, where the climate is comparatively good and the people will be among the hills and woods which they love so well. The atmosphere and buildings will be made as natural as possible. The inmates will live for the most part in long dormitories which will be raised above the ground and have sitting-platforms outside, rather in the manner of the Adi Mishaps. There will be a community recreation centre, built perhaps like a Marung, where the people can sit round a fire and sing. Instead of a bugle it is suggested that there might be a log-drum of the Naga pattern to summon to work or meals.

The food, which will be cooked by the tribal inmates themselves, will be of a kind familiar to them and will include plenty of meat. It is suggested that we should be generous with regard to tobacco and the tribal version of betel, and on special occasions permit even a moderate quantity of rice-beer to be brewed.

Every effort, in fact, will be made to make the environment homely and even happy. Mury is no foundation for education and progress.

If these and other ideals can be fulfilled, we hope that the Sudhar Kendra will send its inmates back to their hills, restored to mental and social health, to take up their lives again as useful and loyal members of tribal society.

#### *Allos, not Rhin, in Medicine*

The same principle, of working through the local institutions and not in rivalry to them, can be applied in the field of medicine.

One of the major difficulties in the way of persuading tribal people in all parts of India to come for medical treatment is the fact that they themselves have a fully developed system of diagnosis and cure. The usual theory of disease in tribal society is that it is caused by hostile spirits, the ghosts of the dead, or

the breach of some taboo. What is spiritually caused, therefore, must be spiritually cured; and this is the main reason why the people prefer to go to their own doctors rather than to our's.

There is no doubt that this theory of disease is a deterrent to many who would otherwise come to dispensaries and hospitals for treatment, and it is natural that the doctors should, therefore, regard the tribal priest as a dangerous professional rival.

But this surely is not necessary. A pious invalid in Europe will send for both the priest and the physician. The priest will pray for him, the physician will give him a pill. The theory is that God answers the priest's prayer by making the pill more efficacious; the physician is the instrument through which the divine compassion works.

A similar compromise has been suggested to the doctors in NEFA. The doctor and the medicine-man should learn to be not rivals, but allies. The doctors must cease to be antagonistic to the system of tribal diagnosis and cure, cease to sneer at it as 'superstitious', and extend to it the sympathy they would feel for any other kind of faith-healing and psychological treatment (for this is what in effect it is), of which there are ample examples throughout the world.

A wise doctor in NEFA will make friends with the local priests, invite them to visit his hospital and let them offer prayers and make sacrifices for his patients, explaining that his own way of treatment is supplementary to their's. For the old methods are not without their value. Many diseases are at least partly due to mental causes—*anxiety* (peptic ulcers), *guilt or fear* (indigestion), *frustration* (constipation). Where a patient believes that his illness is due to sin or breach of some taboo, the priest can, by offering the appropriate sacrifices, remove the sense of guilt and attendant anxiety which is itself a potent cause of ill-health. If the patient thinks he is ill because a ghost or demon has attacked him, the priest can remove the fear and restore confidence by appeasing the offended spirit. His work thus has a really valuable psychological function, for it can promote the will-to-live, which is one of the most important needs in a case of serious illness.

Whenever a hospital or dispensary is opened or when the foundations of such buildings are laid (tribal people attach great

importance to the foundations, and sacrifices are generally offered at this time), the local priests should be invited to perform rites of blessing and protection. If the elaborate bamboo altars which are erected in Siang, Lohit and Subansiri were to stand before



Charm, made of strips of cane,  
to drive away the spirit of  
disease

our hospitals and dispensaries, the people would feel more at home and would come to them more readily, for they would have a greater chance of success if they grew out of the landscape.

The essential thing is for the medical staff to take the right attitude to tribal medicine and the tribal priest. The most successful doctors have been those who have interested themselves



in what we may call medical sociology, in such things as the tribal pharmacopoeia, the tribal theory of the influence of dreams on health, tribal methods of diagnosis. The subject is fascinating in itself, and to study it almost automatically changes a man's attitude and thus helps to win the confidence of the local people.

No one should ever make fun of the tribal priests and doctors in Variety Shows or on other occasions. Elsewhere in tribal India, officials have attempted to wean the people away from their own traditions by mockery, by criticism, even by abuse. This does not succeed; it only makes the tribesmen feel alien from us and creates in them a sense of inferiority and resentment.

The people do not yet feel that the hospitals and dispensaries are *theirs*. They belong to the Government and the patients who go to them are introduced into a strange, alienating, almost wholly alien world. The NEPA Medical Department is now trying to make things more familiar, give patients their own clothes and blankets, have health-charts with their own tribal background, hang the walls of a ward with good photographs of local tribal scenes, talk to them in their own language, permit the consultations of the tribal priests. This will have an appreciable influence towards acclimating modern medicine in NEPA.

This applies, of course, to every aspect of development. Once the people feel that they are taken into confidence, that their wishes, ideas and customs are respected, that they have a real say in things, the whole atmosphere is changed. For example, a young Block Development Officer in Namsang, faced with the problem of persuading the Nokes to take up the building of a road, gathered the members of the tribal council together in a Morning and sat with them, not as a superior official but as a fellow-Indian equally concerned with village affairs. The council debated the matter from eight in the evening till four o'clock the following morning and, as each of the different Chiefs declared his willingness to take up half a mile or so of road-making, the young man thundered on the great log-drums that stood there. The result was that by morning the people felt that the plan had not been imposed upon them but was their own plan and had been ratified by the beating of the sacred drum.

So too a Base Superintendent in the remote outpost of Wakha, faced with the need of providing accommodation for visiting

Wanchen, did not put up a conventional rest-house but built a Morung in the local style complete with drum. When the foundations were laid, the tribal priests came and performed the traditional ceremonies, in which the entire village assisted enthusiastically.

### *The Adaptation of Architecture*

'I find,' exclaimed Mrs Indira Gandhi after visiting the Kulu Valley, 'I find in some of our officials a deplorable tendency to try to make every place look like the better-known hill-stations.' An attempt to make official buildings of every kind in NEFA fit into the local scene is not only an important technique of adaptation, but will by example influence styles of architecture in the villages. So long as official buildings are in a entirely different style, they will not have much influence, but if some of them follow the local tribal designs, but improve on them in technique, they may be copied.

For throughout NEFA, and specially in Siang and Subansiri, there is great scope for improvements in the tribal houses. The Adi, Dallas and others have a curious incapacity for making floors; walls too are sometimes badly constructed and give little protection against the cold wind and the rain. The style and lay-out of the buildings need not be changed, but the technique of construction can be improved and certain features added which would make everyone more comfortable.

Architecture varies greatly from Division to Division and in most places the style of a building is as much a criterion of a certain tribe as its style of hair-dressing. For example, if you ask a Minyong how he differs from a Gallong, he will reply that he cuts his hair short while a Gallong allows it to grow long, and that he builds his house as a long rectangle whereas a Gallong makes it more or less square. There is a great difference between a house in Tirup and a Mishmi house in Lohit or again a Monpa house in western Kameng. It is impossible, therefore, for us to lay down any general rule whereby the architecture and main design of tribal houses should be improved and in actual fact it would be an unpertinence for us to attempt to do so. These houses have gradually evolved throughout the centuries to meet certain necessities of the climate and the conditions of daily life.



For example, while a good many of the houses have fairly high roofs and some of them (such as the houses of the Wancho Gums) have very high roofs indeed, others have rather low ceilings. It is probable that the reason for this is danger from the storms that sweep across the country and often blow down the official buildings.

But there are, as I have already said, certain aspects of the tribal architecture which can everywhere be developed. First and foremost is the floor. If we could teach the people to make good plank floors, it would add greatly to the warmth of the house, for at present the wind whistles up through the broken and badly-constructed bamboo floors; it would prevent unhealthy smells and insects coming up from below, and it would make it much more easy to keep the house clean. It is difficult to use a broom on a bamboo floor, but a wooden floor can easily be swept.

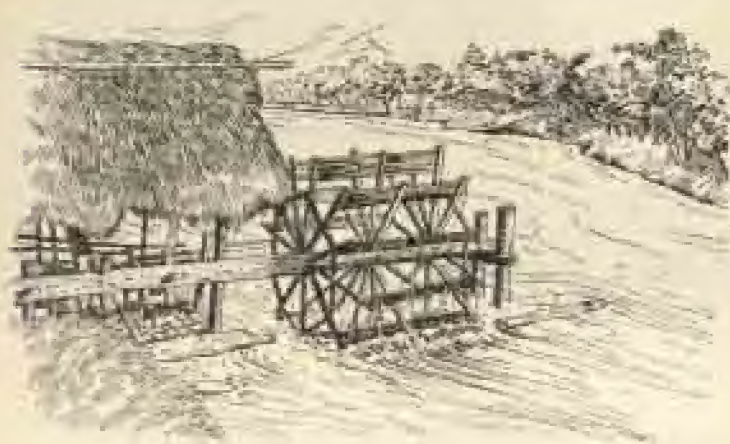
Then again, one of the greatest drawbacks of a tribal house is the smoke. The burning of wood fires, often fed with green branches, fills the houses, which have no kind of chimney, with thick clouds of smoke and these inflame the eyes and cover everything with a layer of dust. A system of double-roofing has now been devised which, without disturbing the main design, will draw off the smoke.

Other forms of ventilation will prove more difficult. Some tribes make windows in their houses and I have stayed in Mishmi, Monpa, Wancho and Adi houses which have been well lighted and ventilated. Other houses are dark and stuffy. We must remember, however, that here too the architecture has evolved to meet certain needs and the lack of windows is sometimes intended to keep out stinging insects, protect from cold and ensure, in the congested conditions of village life, some sort of privacy.

Throughout the hill areas the people make ingenious water-wheels which work rice-huskors (as among the Kukis), grindstones (among the Khampis and Monpas) and even the hammers and bellows of a smithy (among the Khasis). These are a great boon to the village women, for whom the task of grinding and husking grain is a heavy burden, and the Administration is trying to introduce them in areas where they are not known. The Monpas and Sherdukpens confine their water-power in pleasantly designed



and decorated buildings, which will be imitated in all the Buddhist areas. Water is also used for turning prayer-wheels and might be employed for simple machines in the villages which would increase the production of cottage industries. Hitherto the rain has been an enemy of development in these areas; let us turn it into a friend.



A Khampti water-wheel which backs paddy. Other wheels, of a different pattern, housed in small stone buildings, for grinding grain or turning prayer-wheels, are made by the Monpas and Sherdukpens of Kameng and the Membar of the Mecluka Valley.

Although it would be, as I have suggested earlier, desirable that all the buildings should grow out of the landscape and should fit completely into the picture, experience has shown that this may not be possible in the Headquarter townships and in some of the outposts. After all, a house evolves itself according to the use to which it is to be put, and the house of a Political Officer is thus bound to be different from that of a tribal Chief. On the other hand, many of the official buildings, such as schools, hostels, GFTPC institutions, barracks for porters, H. D. Homes and homes for the destitute, rest-houses both for the staff and for the tribal

people in the interior should certainly be in the local style of architecture with a number of obvious improvements.

For official buildings which are made mainly for tribal occupation, I feel that there should always be the following features:—

(1) Every house should be raised well off the ground. Almost all the tribal buildings in NEFA are raised on piles. Few would even dream of living on the damp and dirty ground.

(2) Every house should have a sitting-platform either at the end or along the side. This is an important element in NEFA village life, for the people love to sit out in the sun whenever



Design for a school in the local style of architecture

possible and in, for example, a GFTCP Hostel for girls, the trainees should certainly be encouraged to do their weaving on the platform out of doors when it is fine.

(3) The indoor life of the people centres round the fire. Some tribes regard the hearth as of such great importance that they give special names to its four quarters and there are rules as to who may sit at each, and the kind of work which may be

done there. It is perfectly easy to introduce a hearth even into a floor that is well raised above the ground, and the tribal people themselves have already solved the difficulty; we might well imitate them.

I have frequently been painfully impressed by the cheerlessness of our schools. I have been told by teachers that boys do not attend because they are so cold. When asked why they do not have a fire, they point out that the style of the building is such that you cannot have a fire in it.

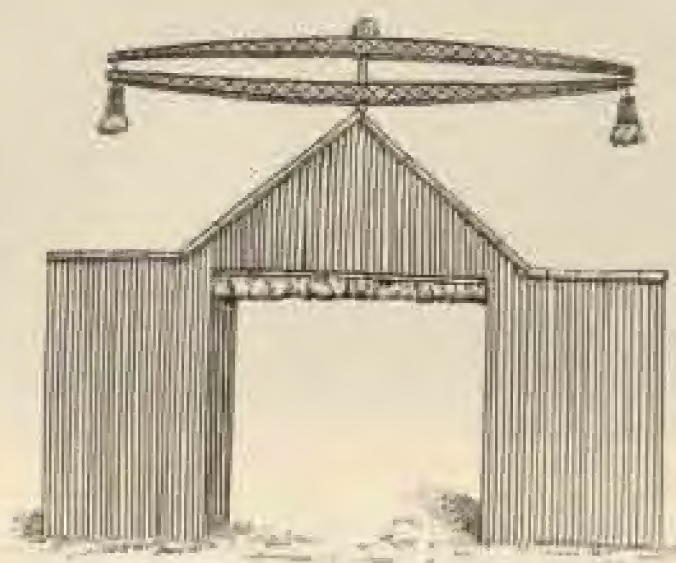
Tribal people do everything in circles; the schools have in the past worked in straight lines and rectangles. In other words, the tribal people like to sit round a fire, to gather in a circle round a teacher or lecturer. Our benches in tidy rows, our library rooms with never a fire in them, the regimentation in lines and rectangles is unfamiliar. The schools, therefore, are now being built in the *chaoy* style, raised above the ground on piles and with a new type of bamboo floor. Hearths are let into this, and the children are given low desks and mats in the traditional Indian style. School hostels too will be designed to allow the boys to sleep round a fire just as they do at home.

The NEFA architects have made some admirable designs, based on local models, for schools, hostels and rest-houses. A type-plan for a two-storied school building, adapted from the historic Dioxg at Dirang-Dioxg, is being used for the more important schools along the northern frontier. The H. D. Sanatoria at Along and Paigbat are planned as Adi villages; the patients, guided to introduce improved features and techniques, build their own houses in their own style; flower gardens are laid out; and everything is done to make the atmosphere homely and natural.

There are plans to transform the H. D. Sanatorium at Tawang, which was built some time ago, into a model Monpa village. As originally conceived it was very much of an institution. There were 'wards', each accommodating two or three patients, which had no hearths, the kitchens being fifty to a hundred yards away. I was told that it was difficult to persuade the patients to sit in their chairs, but cold and cheerless, mean and that they preferred, and naturally, to spend all day in the kitchen by the fire. It is now planned to build double-storied houses on the Monpa pattern, with sitting-platforms, and hearths in the living-rooms.



There will be a Ganga for the people's consolation, and among the traditional Buddhist paintings on the walls there may well be one of Gandhiji tending the lepers at Sevagram.



Gate in tribal style erected at the Divisional headquarters at Ziro

When this policy is implemented, the buildings of NEFA will grow out of the landscape: they will be natural and homely: they will create an atmosphere in which all good tribal things can flourish: and they will, in time, influence by their example the village architecture for good.

### *Dress and the Inferiority Complex*

I have already discussed at length the whole philosophy of dress and have hinted that the sharp contrast between the normal tribal dress and our own is one cause of the inferiority complex that threatens the people of NEFA. For while on one side this complex is fostered by deep social and cultural conflicts, on another it depends to no small degree on externals.

Subconsciously at least, the effect on the tribal mind of a large body of officials attired in a different dress helps to create the feeling that whatever is tribal is somehow inferior. If, therefore, our officers—and their wives—adopt certain elements of tribal dress, they not only fit better into the landscape and come nearer to their people, but they help to counteract this unhappy type of mental depression.

We are not to be fanatical about this—no one, for example, would suggest that the Political Officer of Subansiri should put on an Apa Tani tail. And we recognise that it is much easier to use tribal dress in some areas than in others. There is no hardship in Kameng for an officer to wear the warm, appropriate and aesthetically pleasing Monpa dress; it would be less easy for him to adopt the Wancho ornaments, and go about in nothing else.

The NEFA officials have accepted this idea with enthusiasm and it has been greatly appreciated. In Suang and Lohit the Political Officers and others compose with one another in the colours and designs of their locally-made coats. The Commandant and officers of the 2nd Battalion of the Assam Rifles in the Lohitpur mess wear black Mishmi coats with their evening dress and they go very well with white shirts and black ties. A special type of coat designed in Tirap, black in colour with a decoration adapted from bead-designs, is becoming popular. In western Kameng, many officials and their wives regularly wear the warm and entirely suitable Monpa dress. Even in Shillong a number of officers wear Mishmi, Adi or Apa Tani coats and when Mr N. K. Rustomji, former Adviser, visited Delhi and Shillong recently he wore a complete Sikkimese outfit and looked very well in it; Mr K. L. Mehta, his successor, looks equally smart in an Apa Tani waistcoat. Some of the officers' wives too use the local skirts and shawls. They need not be ashamed to do so, for a good Mishmi or Naga shawl will add beauty to the most beautiful of wives.

A recent innovation has been the making of hand-woven neckties of tribal design, which have become popular among members of the staff.

It is interesting that even some British officials long ago adopted the same attitude. In a letter written by H. M. Kisch, a member



of the Indian Civil Service, from the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1875, he describes how nearly all the officers stationed in the hill areas liked to live in the houses of the people, eating their food, 'and even adopting their style of dress and habits.' 'The attractive character of the people,' he concludes, 'makes all who come in contact with them conform to their ways.'

The dress of tribal employees presents a special problem. Some of these are proud of their own attire, and come to greet you in splendid ceremonial hats and colourful ornaments which go well with their red coats. But others adopt European fashions because these are supposed to give additional importance and prestige. In India the sola topi is no longer worn by Europeans, to whom it has become the subject of rather corny jokes; but the minor official, the Sub-Inspector of Police, the Forest Ranger has adopted it as a sign of power. In the same way, a tribal chairman in NEPA who has a topi or a kamshing hat, boots and a quite unnecessary pair of coloured spectacles is in a better position to throw his weight about than if he was in his own traditional dress. This helps to create a sense of inferiority among the mass of the people.

Many years ago Dr Hutton made a suggestion to the Baptist Mission which I revive here, for it can well be applied to present-day conditions and other tribal areas.

'It is difficult to see why the taste for colour and brilliant effects which the Naga possesses should not be turned to the glory of God instead of being regarded as an offence before him. If the bright cloths, worn as a reward for the giving of Feats of Merit by the ancients, were retained by the Christians for their own acts of social service; if the insignia of renown in war were made badges of rank in the congregation, and deacons and pastors encouraged to wear hornbill feathers and cowrie spoons to denote their office, while those assembling for divine worship were encouraged to do honour to the occasion by dressing in their best; if they were encouraged to adorn their church buildings with carvings, as they have done their Meetings and their log-drums in the past, it is hard for a layman to see how the Deity would be dishonoured thereby, while their unquestionable artistic sense would be encouraged and possibly infused with fresh vigour.'

Culture-change hits everyone at a different angle—and in the case of NEPA employees its main target is the hat. It has been





Naga-style and Mump-style hats  
decorated with badges

suggested that we might have for each division the most honourable kind of local head-gear, with badges representing the Ashoka pillar attached in front, to present to those employees who have done good work and proved their loyalty.

In Kameng, for example, we might have the very fine Kalimping hats which have a crown of yellow silk rising above a brim of fur. In Slang there are cane hats decorated with red and black hair. Some of the hats of the Subansiri Chiefs are most imposing. In Tirap there are several varieties of hat which used to be adorned with head-hunting trophies; they may now be distinguished by the pillar of peace.

It is important that all this sort of thing should be done tactfully and without compulsion. A former Deputy-Commissioner of the Naga Hills fined anyone who came into his presence in western clothes, refused scholarships to any boy in shorts and shirt, denied promotion or even employment to any Naga who did not wear his national dress. We do not want that kind of imposition. We should not force even tribal things on the tribal people if they do not want them.

### *Education*

Somebody once said that war was far too important a business to be left to soldiers. Education in the tribal areas is far too serious a matter to be left to school-masters. The entire NEFA Administration might be called a tribal university with the Governor as its Chancellor. For in any part of the world which aims at graded and scientific progress, every official must be an educationist. In NEFA the Political Officers and their staff educate the people to know, love and be loyal to India; they teach them how to build up and manage their councils for judicial and development work; they inspire them with ideas of equality and justice which in time will make them release slaves of their own accord; they are trying to educate them out of the opium habit and to aim, within the framework of their own traditions, at living fuller and richer lives. The Medical Officers educate them in habits of cleanliness and simple ways of preventing and treating disease; they are not there merely to cure it. The agriculturalists have the most vital task of all, in carrying on research and imparting its results to the tribal cultivators.

The engineers are educating them in road-making and building houses. The forest officers are teaching them the value of their forests and to protect their wild animals and birds. This is the real Adult Education, which is something much more than collecting a group of elderly men and making them trace laboriously a few letters of the alphabet on slates.

It is essential that education in the more specialized sense should be integrated with this wider education. The schools must also aim at inspiring a love of India, at teaching cleanliness, better ways of cultivation, the preservation of wild life, at spreading the ideals of justice, equality and humanity. They must be integrated with the life of the people so that a school becomes as much a tribal institution as a *Morung* or *Adi* dormitory. The work of a school begins in the home and continues throughout the pupil's life; the teacher should be as interested in the parents as in their children.

But tribal education is a difficult and rather risky enterprise, and the Administration is wisely promoting it with caution. It is extremely hard to get teachers of the right type, and it has to train carefully those it employs. In a sparsely populated area, it is vital that the ecological balance of society should not be disturbed too rapidly, for however strong an emphasis is laid on the 'basic' aspects of education, it remains a fact that most educated boys and girls want to get away from the land—and we certainly have no right to blame them. And many boys leave their schools after a year or two and return home as mistis in their villages.

The aim of education of NEFA is twofold, and the emphasis in its two aspects will obviously be somewhat different. We have first to discover and develop boys and girls of exceptional promise, and train them up to the highest standard possible so that they can in time take their place as leaders and administrators of their own people. But this can only apply to a very small proportion of the total population; for the great mass of the tribesmen, who will remain peasants, a very simple and elementary type of schooling is required and we hope that this will be supplied by a combination of ordinary and Basic education, suitably adjusted to tribal needs.

But in both cases it is essential to guard against the dangers of



destruction. Hitherto our schools and our teachers have been such as to increase the dangers rather than to cure them. In the past there was little attempt at a serious adaptation to tribal life



Illustration from *Miri Kitar*, a collection of Auli songs, published by the NEFA Administration

or at giving it any kind of tribal flavour. The style of the buildings, the dress alike of teachers and taught, the charts and pictures on the walls, the medium of instruction, the games were all alien to the local scene. The result was that instead of appearing as a natural function of village life, the school was something

apart, even hostile to tribal tradition. There was nothing in our schools to foster a boy's pride in the institutions of his tribe, everything to make him ashamed of them. Although we often speak of a special education for NEPA, there has in fact been little to distinguish its schools from the conventional schools of the plains.

This state of things is a heritage of the past and today we are working hard to remedy it. In the first place, the Education Department insists that school teachers should learn to give instruction in the tribal languages as soon as possible and rules have been made that if they cannot pass a language examination within a certain time, their increments will be withheld. It is also preparing text-books composed with special reference to local conditions and in no fewer than fifteen dialects. It has produced alphabet-charts with illustrations which have an appropriate tribal background. It is adapting architecture and furniture to local conditions. It is encouraging tribal games and dances along with such new diversions as football and volley-ball.

As education is adjusted to tribal life as a whole, the schools will come to be places where the children lose their pride in being tribal, learn to despise their own religion, and forget their own traditions, their dances, their songs and their art.

An interesting example of how this has been achieved elsewhere is found in an account (by Purna Bhatia) of Mr Nehru's visit to the Central Institute for National Minorities at Peking. Here are nearly two thousand students, representing more than forty minorities, including many from Tibet, Sinkiang and Mongolia. The intention is to give the national minorities facilities to get together in a common field of instruction, at the same time retaining their separate national entities and characteristics. No attempt is made to iron out their national personalities. During our visit to classrooms we saw rude Tibetan students dressed in their national costumes, complete with felt hats, which they wore during their lessons. Boys and girls from Singkiang retained their colourful dresses. There is a small but beautiful museum of representative arts and crafts and of costumes to familiarise each minority with the customs and habits of the others. . . . The Prime Minister seemed charmed by the feast of colour and healthy variety.<sup>7</sup>

The transformation of the existing schools with their town-made



syllabus and artificial urban approach by a modified Basic programme should help to relate them to the local economy, the traditional tribal culture and the actual life of the village. Ideally, they should be managed by the tribal council and, where there are co-operatives, should work in close co-operation with them, so that council, co-operative and school become a trinity of development activity.

This will help the people to feel that a school is not something imposed by and belonging to Government, but that it is their own institution, in the running of which they have an important part and for which they are responsible. The older people sometimes fear that a school will lead to a breakdown of respect for traditional authority and that every boy or girl who attends it is an economic loss to them. In what Mr Krishnamachari calls 'the fragmented administration' of the ordinary village, there are grounds for such apprehensions, but if council, school and co-operative can work together as one unit the danger may be averted.

We are trying to create this sense of responsibility and 'belonging' in a number of ways. School text-books, for example, are in the first instance being cyclostyled and given to the people for correction. We say to them, 'These are your books, the first sketches in a literature of your own. Study them and tell us where we are wrong. We will then revise them and give them back to you in an attractive printed form.' The result has been some healthy controversy about the correctness of the translations.

And then there are plans, though these have not yet been fully implemented, for using the existing institutions, such as the *Gangpas* in the Buddhist areas, the *Morungs* in Tirap and the boys' dormitories in Sang, for educational purposes. If it is possible to work through them, instead of in treaty to them, not only will the schools be more attractive, but many psychological conflicts will be resolved. In the Buddhist countries, such as Sikkim, Ceylon and Thailand, schools are often associated with the temples and monasteries, and in the Buddhist areas of NEFA some progress has already been made in this direction. At Chokkham, for example, the school is fed from a boy's hostel located in the temple compound and maintained by public donations. Throughout western Kameng, Lamas regularly visit the schools, and local festivals are celebrated in them.



For in this area, there is already a system of education, which has reached its highest development in the monastery at Tawang.

This might be described as a combination of an old-fashioned Cathedral School and a Basic Education Centre. A large number of boys come to the monastery to be trained, but in actual practice many of them marry and settle down to lay-life after a time. They are attached in groups to the senior Lamas who act as tutors. Some of the boys study in the library, others look after



Design for a school-building in Monpa style

the ponies, cook in the kitchen, practise agriculture, care for the cattle, while yet others are trained in dancing, art-work and even printing. They work in the library in an atmosphere of art, religion and learning: the walls are painted with pictures and hung with scrolls. The boys sit on the floor on cushions covered with decorated mats and read on little tables placed in front of them. The atmosphere is almost that of one of the older European Universities or, as I have said, of a Cathedral School. But there is also the 'basic' side: the boys get training in hygiene, the dignity of manual work and learn fundamental lessons of discipline, obedience and religious faith which remain with them all their lives.

It had been hoped to work through this ancient institution; not to run a rival school, but to use the existing monastic school by enlarging its academic scope and opening its doors to the laity.

This has not proved possible, as the Lamas are afraid that secular influences may impair their religious integrity, but the Government school at Tawang is being built in the Monpa style and the closest relations are being maintained with the great lamasery.

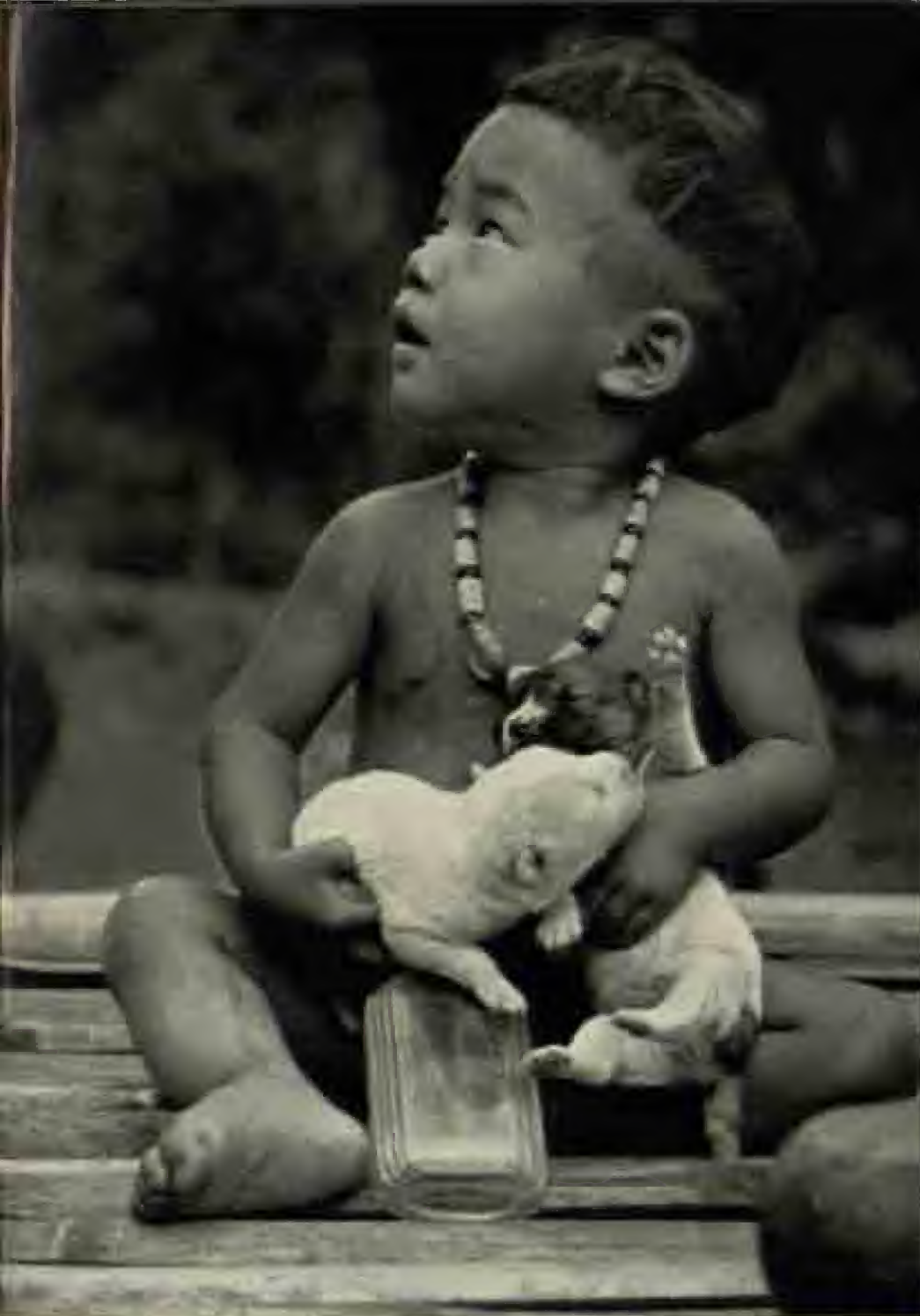
At one time, it was almost routine for teachers to insist on children changing their dress, cutting their hair, removing their ornaments and even taking the flowers from their ears. As a result schoolboys began to look very odd, they went in for dark glasses, gaudy socks, crepe shoes. School-girls began to put on trousers, and use powder and lipstick. Once a group of girls crept into their headmaster's office and took his red ink to paint their lips.

But today, while allowing the boys and girls entire freedom to wear anything they like, school-teachers no longer impose their own fashions on them, and tactfully suggest that there is nothing to be admired of in, for example, a good Adi coat, a hand-woven blouse or a Mishimi shawl. But the Administration has gone even further than this. It is now providing a school uniform of tribal design for hostel students in all its major schools. The scheme was initiated in Paslhat, where the boys and girls became so enthusiastic that they contributed, of their own accord, one-third of the cost. An excellent blazer was designed, based on the red Adi coat, and hand-woven on the Adi loom. But it is better tailored, it has sleeves, a collar, buttons and two pockets. It remains fully tribal, but is at the same time adapted to school needs. Similar coats have been made for the schools elsewhere; on the Apa Tani plateau they have an attractive blazer in black and orange; the Mishonis have an adaptation of their own coats; Khampis and Tangkas, who wear the Burnese-fungi woven in their own homes, are taking this as their uniform. In western Kameng, Monpas and Sherdukpens are being given their traditional dress, with certain additional features.

School-girls have hand-woven blouses, skirts and shawls of local colour and design, and look very nice in them.

Khaki shorts are being discouraged and instead, the boys are being given shorts of dark red, green or black, with a coloured stripe of tribal pattern down the side.

Throughout India there is a very great variety of custom in hair-style. The Sikhs, one of the most progressive communities



A Mingsong child





*Apa Tani games: (above) the Snake Game (below) the Game of the Short-Tailed Bird*

in the country, are strongly attached to the traditional method of allowing their hair to grow long. South Indian Brahmins shave their heads; some cut their hair in a fringe, some allow a tuft to hang down behind, some even have peignails. There is a similar variety in NEFA, and the method of hair-dressing is usually established in the mythological tradition and is one of the distinctive signs of a tribe. The Tangras of Timp do their hair in a knot on the top of the head, but their Noco neighbours do it in a style similar to that of the Vaidimawes of the phlun. In Lolit, the Idu Mishmis cut their hair short; the Taram Mishmis wear it long. In Sang, the Minyongs and Padams cut the hair short and the Galungs, Bokars, Borks and other tribes allow it to grow. Some women and girls crop, or even shave, their hair; some tie it in a plait; others pile it up on the top of the head: there is great, and charming, variety.

In the past, there was a tendency on the part of some officers, and specially the school-teachers (no doubt due to ignorance), to persuade the people to change their hair-style.

The Administration has pointed out that this amounts to imposition and is, therefore, against its policy. At the same time it has emphasised that:

'We must not prevent a school-boy or indeed anybody else from doing his hair in a style he pleases. Equally, however, we should not in any way suggest to him that there is something backward or uncivilised in his own traditional method. As a matter of fact all our officials and particularly school-teachers should always bear in mind our policy of creating an atmosphere of respect for tribal culture and the tribal way of doing things.

To summarise, we are not to interfere if any boy or girl wishes to change his habit, but we should create an atmosphere in which the tribal people will not be ashamed to follow their own customs'.

We have to scrutinise carefully the kind of equipment supplied to schools in the tribal areas, for books, charts and pictures that may be quite suitable for more sophisticated populations elsewhere may create confusion in the minds of the simple, literal-minded children of the hills. For example, there was at one time in all the NEFA schools, and probably in schools elsewhere, a chart illustrating the Progress of Man. The first picture was of a tribesman, ugly, dirty and uncouth, sitting before his cave. In

the next he was shown taking a sunny nap on a hillside; in the next he had taken to ploughing in the next to a tractor. The last picture suggested the aim and goal of education: the former savage, dressed in smart, if somewhat odd, European clothes, stood in front of an enormous palace, doing absolutely nothing. It would be hard to imagine a better way of putting into the youthful tribal mind a scorn of his past and an ambition to reach a point where he would no longer have to work with his own hands.



*Silver pipe of a kind popular among the Mahars*

School textbooks commonly refer to the use of tobacco and alcohol as a sin. In the tribal areas this is likely to create a mental conflict that cannot be good for the children. Tobacco is one of the few consolations available to their parents in the hard life of the hills; many of the officials whom they like and respect are smokers; in their society rice-beer is essential in religious and social ceremonies and supplements the diet with important elements of nutrition. To be taught that these things are wicked, therefore, puzzles the children, and creates a sense of guilt, an entirely unnecessary moral confusion.

In histories of modern India the boys read that in the struggle for Independence, many Satyagrahis, who are rightly held up for their admiration, took a vow to abstain from tea. At the same time, they see officers encouraging tea as a refreshing drink which promotes temperance. The Administration is also trying to persuade the people to take milk. And then they read that Gandhiji



himself vowed never to touch cow's-milk. They do not understand the background, and are naturally confused.

Books for supplementary reading in schools are packed with stories, often very good stories, drawn from *Aesop's Fables* and Hindu or Christian mythology, which enrich the children's lives, but tend to make them despise their own stories which are not given the honour of print. A senior officer visited one of the NEFA High Schools, and asked the students to tell him stories. A small boy retold the tale of the Fox and Grapes. 'That's very nice' said the visitor, 'but what I really wanted to hear was one of the stories told in your own village.' There was a dead silence, and then, in a voice of complete and utter woe, the boy said: 'O you mean folk-tales!'

The Administration has scrapped the inappropriate charts and is preparing others to take their place. Though it is educating the people in temperance and setting its face against the introduction of distilled spirit, it is not buying for the schools books which will confuse the children by teaching them that their beer and tobacco are wrong. A book on Gandhiji has been specially written which stresses those aspects of his life which will appeal to the tribal mind. The boys at the High School which I have just described were asked to send in some of their own stories, and one or two of them were printed in *The Sunday Statesman* under their own names: when they were actually paid for the despised folk-tales, it naturally created a profound impression.

These may seem to be small matters, yet taken together the total impact is considerable, and I have no doubt that as the new policy is implemented, and self-confidence and pride is removed, the sense of inferiority will disappear.

At the same time, we need to be careful and selective in our educational policy. Mere numbers are no indication of success or lack of numbers of failure.

'It would be barbarous,' said Rousseau, 'to twist a child's nature and kill his joy in preparing him for a future which may not be his.' It would be well to bear in mind the warning of the author of the note on Madhya Pradesh from which I have already quoted. Cultural penetration through education, he says, may have the effect of disturbing too rapidly a traditional society. The collapse of tribal loyalties leads to bewilderment, followed by dis-

illusion, inevitably followed by social degeneration and crime.' A race of clerks is created, to which a large part of the incipients of this education are unfit to belong, and which class it in any case too numerous, and unable to obtain a decent standard of living as a consequence.

'Such people are a ready field in which to sow the seeds of every form of discontent, for they have just sufficient education to be a great trouble to the less scholastically educated but more stable mass of the population, as well as to properly constituted authority.

'Such an education *for the mass* acts like a corrosive in the community, undermining the solidarity of the tribal peoples.'

Education, however, under any circumstances, is bound to be disturbing, and one of the problems it creates is a conflict between the generations. This has become urgent in, for example, Manipur and Tripura; it is, in fact, not confined to the tribal areas: it is to be noted all over India. It is not yet critical in NEFA, but it will be one day, and it is necessary to think ahead.

Leaving aside the question of detribalization, the boys and girls in the schools will learn, for example, that all men are equal, that they should be kind to animals, that in other parts of the world people marry girls of their own choice. They will thus become impatient of any kind of slavery or inequality; they may react strongly against cruel methods of sacrifice; they are certain to rebel against the long-drawn business negotiations connected with marriage, and their parents' custom of arranging their life-partners for them. They will not easily put up with a system of taboos which prevents them going about, or weaving when they want to, or working in the fields at just the right time. They may come to feel that the older people are obstacles to progress, and will demand a bigger and revolutionary say in the village councils.

They may, if the elders are too obstructive, destroy much that is good along with the bad. But if the elders are liberal, flexible and sympathetic, adapting themselves to the changing times, old and young may together work out a new and happier way of life that will not be a break with tradition and history but will grow out of the past, along the lines of their own genius. It is essential, therefore, to prepare the elders for this situation, so that when it comes it will not take them by surprise and they will not resent



it. In some tribes the power of the Chiefs is still very great, and we do not want to destroy that power, but only to modify it with the idealism of youth. This is a matter of great delicacy, for the conflict may be merely destructive, yet if we anticipate and prepare for it, even the conflict may be productive of good.

Education has actually been defined as 'the relationship between successive generations.' Dr J. Rann, who accepts this in his valuable book, *Chaga Childhood*, a study of tribal youth in Africa, goes on to say that 'the breadth of this definition has the advantage of extending the range of education beyond the first twenty years of human life, and it does not regard education as a process to be completed at a certain stage. It allows for adult education, allows for the influence of children upon adults, comprises the essential significance of children to their parents and the social value based on offspring, and also shows the effect of unplanned acts upon the educational relationship which is conceived to be exclusively personal.'

### *The Importance of Language*

Most of the languages spoken by the tribesmen of NEFA belong to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the main Sino-Tibetan family. There are (if we include the dialects) about fifty in all, though some of them are fairly closely related to one another. Grierson considered that Adi, Miri, Pasi and Mnyong were identical and that Dafa was also essentially the same. In fact Adi-Dafa, which is spoken in some form or other from eastern Khamti to western Lohit, right across the centre of NEFA, may ultimately grow into one great language. The Moskos and Khaubas of the north speak a dialect of Tibetan; Khampthi and Singpho are vaguely connected with Burmese and Tai; Wancho and Nocte have been described as 'distant cousins of the Naga group'. From the point of view of this book, their most significant feature is, in Dr Gupta's words, that they are only able to express concrete ideas and are not good media 'for expressing abstract conceptions or higher thought—a peculiarity which has had considerable psychological influence in moulding the minds of the speakers to an objective rather than to a theoretical outlook.'

Some of these languages, with their unfamiliar phonemes, their agglutinative foundation, their stress on alveolars, the glottal stop



and palatalized liquids of Jda and Tangsa, the tones of Idu and Singpho, are very hard to learn. It is equally difficult to translate books into them or put them down on paper.

Yet it is vital to encourage them. "The language problem," says Mr Nehru, "is almost always exceedingly important from the psychological point of view. The best of solutions can come to naught, if misunderstood or misinterpreted by the party concerned. It is absolutely clear to me that Government must encourage the tribal languages. It is not enough simply to allow them to prevail. They must be given all possible support and the conditions in which they can flourish must be safeguarded. We must go out of our way to achieve this."

In the Soviet Republic we have the example of a country that has adopted such a policy with success. Lenin and other leaders in his time were exceedingly wise in this respect. Regardless of their ultimate objective, they wanted to win the goodwill of the people, and they won it largely by their policy of encouraging their languages, by going out of their way to help hundreds of dialects by preparing dictionaries and vocabularies and sometimes even by evolving new scripts where there were none. They wanted their people to feel that they were free to live their own lives and they succeeded in producing that impression.

This is one aspect of the problem. Another is the learning of these languages by members of the staff. A large quantity of linguistic material has been collected, which the NEFA philologists are busy organizing into the phrase-books and dictionaries to which the Prime Minister has referred, and which are clearly of the highest importance. For a knowledge of the language is the window by which we see into the tribal mind; it is the door through which we shall most readily receive affection and co-operation. In former days, the most popular and useful officers were, almost without exception, those who could talk to the people in their own tongue. Refiance on interpreters has many disadvantages. A clever interpreter can lead an officer up the garden path, he can twist affairs to his own advantage or that of his own clan, village or tribe; in some places a cause of resentment and suspicion of the Administration is the feeling that officers allow themselves to be unduly swayed or even misrepresented by their interpreters.

And even as a cure for the feeling of inferiority, this is an essential matter. The tribal folk of Assam are intensely proud of their languages, the Khasis, for example, who have in the course of the past century changed their way of life in many respects, cling enthusiastically to their own tongue. When a man sees that the officers sent to work for him do not apparently think it worth their while to learn his language, it creates a feeling of depression, and stresses the so easily-created feeling that he belongs to an inferior race. On the other hand, when an officer approaches him with speech that he can understand, he is encouraged, excited and inspired with a pride in this essential element of his own culture.

For these reasons, the Administration has given high priority to the learning of the tribal languages.

### *The Danger of Pauperisation*

The custom of trying to keep the tribesmen happy and content by giving them presents is very old. In the British period, officers and explorers on tour gave extravagant gifts, not all of the most appropriate kind: in Lohit, for example, opium was distributed as a 'political present'; in Solaimuri ugly and unsuitable gifts of cloth impaired the natural taste of the people; and everywhere rum was one of the most popular ways of establishing friendly relations.

The custom has continued to the present time, but in a modified form and, of course, the giving of opium and rum has now been stopped. Some years ago, the Administration decided that the use of what are now called 'people's presents' in the settled areas should be cut to a minimum, and that there should be an annual reduction everywhere with the idea of eliminating them altogether by the end of the Second Five-Year Plan period.

The matter is not easy. On a tour of exploration a suitable gift may make the difference between hostility and friendliness; in the more settled villages, the Chiefs are often obliging and hospitable and suffer without complaint the dislocation of their daily work that is inevitably caused by an official visit. To give a few leaders a present as a reward for services rendered is a graceful and pleasant act. In this case the word 'present' is incorrect; it is a courteous way of making payment.



But there are certain dangers in this practice. In some places presents are expected as a right and there have been cases in the past when Chiefs have returned a gift as insufficiently expensive. I have found too, especially among the Konyaks and the tribes of northern Solumon, a distressing habit of begging, begging on a rather large and persistent scale. An officer's camp, or a Divisional headquarters, should not be regarded as a sort of store where you can get free goods.

A great deal depends on the kind of things that are given. If they are chosen with intelligence, they may help to promote tribal art and industries. When Mr Jaimundaz Dondatram visited Tuensang in 1932, he distributed as many as four hundred bundles of yarn there and two hundred more at Mon. He ordered two hundred pieces of steel for daos. He gave away two-and-a-half strands of cowrie shells for ornamental dresses, and a large quantity of beads.

The Administration has now ordered that yarn, beads, cowrie shells, agricultural implements, soap, salt and tea should be the commonest presents given and that where cloth has to be given it should be locally woven. Where cloth of any kind is given it should normally not be white, but of some gay colour.

Although some parts of NEFA are very 'colourful', there are great tracts of drabness, where colour is a psychological as well as an artistic need, a need which can be met by gifts of yarn and the development of the dyeing industry. The application of aesthetics to benevolence will help to meet this need.

But in any case yarn is a far better gift than cloth. Gifts of cloth have had a bad effect on the psychology of the people; they have defamed their taste; they have discouraged the hand-loom industry; and in some cases they have been abused by officers who have traded them for food-supplies.

Even where the people have little to wear (though actually there are few such places), and a humanitarian instinct urges us to make presents of cloth, it is better to introduce yarn and hand-loom so that they can make their own clothes, rather than to give mountable clothes which may permanently injure their good taste and their self-reliance.

Allied to the problem of people's presents is the question of relief. This needs to be considered against the background of the



traditional self-reliance and co-operative spirit of the tribes. When a house is burnt down, the people from half-a-dozen neighbouring villages assemble with wood, bamboo and thatch and help to rebuild it. I have several times watched a village co-operating to repair a house for some poor widow. In the old days the tribesmen themselves built bridges and made trails.

There was formerly a danger that an over-generous policy of giving relief at almost every emergency would destroy this fine spirit among the people. Obviously, our first instinct is to pour out assistance to the poor wherever they are in need, but we do need to ask ourselves whether the ultimate result will be good. In Madhya Pradesh the tribal people today only reluctantly take up any corporate activity, such as cleaning a well or mending a tank; everything is the business of the Government. I have found this attitude in parts of NEFA; it is not 'our business' to clear a path or mend a bridge—Government must do it. And it may well come about that if someone's house is burnt down, the fine spirit of tribal relief will no longer operate and the people will say, 'Let Government see to it'.

To save the people from pauperisation, to preserve the spirit of self-help and self-reliance, to maintain the ideal of co-operation and neighbourliness, the Administration has decided that relief should be given only in exceptional and tragic cases. Here again, the kind of relief to be given is most important. The provision of food, and still more seed, does not pauperise the people when it is given in a real emergency. But the distribution of cloth, utensils, bed-sheets, and other things may have a bad psychological effect, especially when the things distributed are not natural to the tribal scene. Blouses, towels, singlets, and all sorts of unfamiliar utensils have been given in the past to people who had never used them. It may be that the blouse and the singlet will come—but it need not come as a result of having one's house burnt down. Moreover, this constant distribution of foreign things is in itself a way of imposing our ways and manners on the people, and is thus contrary to our fundamental policy.

A special type of pauperisation, which has a singularly bad subconscious effect in impressing on the people a sense of having a lower status, is the custom of officers and their wives giving away their cast-off clothes. Some of the tribal people themselves

are bad about this; they come begging for an old shirt, a pair of trousers, a blouse; if one of them is employed as a house-servant, it is so easy to dress him up in one of master's shirts.

But this amiable habit should be resisted. The people of NEPA are not paupers to be turned into clowns with second-hand clothing; they are traditionally a proud people, and though a former thoughtless and undirected tradition has done something to make them servile, we must at all costs now bring it to an end. This applies equally to the Assam Rifles and Army Engineers, some of whom are sincerely generous, as well as to the civil staff. Generosity can often do more harm than good.

Once when I was in Margherita, a Nocio girl came to the Political Officer's office (which at that time was in the town) complaining that her money had been stolen. Asked what she had been intending to spend it on, she replied that she had come down from her village to buy some cloth. Kindly subordinates immediately suggested that, as she had been robbed by civilization, civilization should repay the debt, and that she should be given cloth or money equivalent to what she had lost. The Political Officer, however, had a better idea; he asked her if she could weave. She said that she could and he therefore presented her with a bundle of yarn (of colours suitable to her tribe) and suggested that she should herself weave the cloth she needed. She was delighted and went away *consoled*.

This little incident is to my mind a parable of the proper way of bringing relief to those in need.

Unintelligent benevolence can be as great a menace to the tribesman's character as intelligent exploitation can be to his pocket.

### *'Through Their Own Team'*

The ultimate solution of the inferiority complex is to train up the tribal people to do the work which at present we are presuming to do for them. Once they realize that the future is their's, they will be able to keep their heads high.

'It is obvious,' says Mr Nehru, 'that these areas have to progress. But it is equally obvious that they have to progress in their own way. They have their own likes. They do not like something alien to be imposed upon them. No individual can grow in alien



surroundings, habits, or customs. How are we going to keep these two things together? It is not an easy problem... We have to find a middle course. And that can only succeed if the people are in harmony with it and co-operate with it and there is no element of compulsion about it. That approach also has ultimately to be applied through their own people.

The first thing, therefore, is to train their own people who can work among them and that will be far more effective than for outsiders to try.... We have to make them progress, but progress does not mean just an attempt to duplicate what we have got in any part of India. It may not be suitable to them. It may not be suitable even to India. But there are many things in India which are suitable to them. They will adopt them gradually. Any element of imposition has to be absent so far as possible and so people have to be trained to train others. It may not be a very rapid progress. Every kind of training takes time. Whatever profession you may adopt, it takes years to train people, engineers, doctors and so on. It is better to go ahead on a firm basis than merely to knock about with odd jobs here and there. There is a tendency to do odd jobs in improving them without any firm outlook.

The cardinal principle of the Second Five Year Plan in NEPA, as Mr K. L. Mehta has remarked, 'is to provide special facilities for the training of the inhabitants of NEPA themselves. The intention is that the increasing demand for personnel as a result of the implementation of our schemes should be met from among the local people to the maximum extent possible. Our key institutions such as the Extension Training Centre, the Basic Education Training Centre, and the Health Training Centre will have to shoulder a very large responsibility in meeting this challenge. To mention only a few, we have to train school-teachers, compounders and agricultural staff in the shortest possible time. We hope that it will not be long before doctors, engineers and indeed administrators can be found from among the residents of NEPA. This, to my mind, is the crux of the problem.'

But even now, before this plan can be fully implemented, the Administration is trying to associate the tribal people in every possible way with its work. As Mr K. L. Mehta has said again: 'The inculcation of self-confidence in the people is perhaps the most important single factor in bringing success in the type of work we are attempting to do. We must give them opportunities to participate even at the elementary stage of working out schemes



for their own betterment. The success of our policy will depend on our ability to blend the demands of modern technology and the subjective demands of the people with the moral demand, which has been explained as "the universal right of man to make significant choices."

I doubt whether we are still doing as much as we should to develop a sense of confidence and pride amongst the people and at the same time to give them scope to solve their own problems. In other words we should act in accordance with a recent Community Project slogan that all development programmes should be regarded by the people as *their* programmes and that Government steps in only to help them in fulfilling them speedily and efficiently.<sup>1</sup> Development is for the people, not the people for development.

## Chapter Six

### RELIGIOUS AIMS IN NEFA

*The religions we call false were once true.*

—R. W. EMERSON

The problem of religion in NEFA is a complex one, for the sudden impact and rapid development to which the people have been exposed is without precedent, and it is thus not easy to predict what their reactions will be. In other parts of tribal India, where the process of acculturation has been spread over a hundred years, the tribesmen have gradually assimilated elements of Hinduism such as the adoption of social and food taboos, a change in the names of the old gods to relate them to the deities of the Hindu pantheon, and a more elevated notion of the Supreme Being. A certain number, but few compared to the large numbers converted in Assam, have adopted an entirely new religion such as Christianity or Islam.

What then is likely to happen in NEFA? In ten years time there will be a considerable body of educated young men and women. Will they find it possible to maintain their faith in the old religions? Will they return to their villages and introduce religious reforms as many educated Hindus reformed Hinduism in the last century? Or will they adopt a new religion, Buddhism, Hinduism or Christianity?

I doubt if the NEFA people will accept Hinduism in any organized manner. Between them and that great religion stands the gentle figure of the cow. Yet there are many things which should attract them in popular Hinduism: the same belief in a supreme deity ruling over a host of lesser spirits; the same sacrifices; the same colourful festivals; myths and legends of a rather similar pattern. But the tribal people, even the educated ones, will not give up their mutton, beef and beer; they are likely to reject the caste system, the new and unfamiliar taboos, the prevailing Puritanism.

Christianity has made an appeal to the hill people of Assam (though, curiously enough, it has had very little success in Middle India and Orissa) because it has been associated in their minds with the idea of progress. Christianity in the past has meant hospitals, education, the English language, a larger richer material life, a gospel of universal brotherhood. Its flexibility with regard to food rules has more than compensated for its rigidity about such matters as rice-bear and polygamy.

A number of people, themselves Christians by faith, believe that the best solution of the religious question in NEFA is to admit Indian missionaries and to encourage a general Christianisation of the tribes. If the form of Christianity introduced was of a liberal kind and truly national in spirit, this would, they argue, bring many spiritual benefits to the people, and would save the educated from adopting an irreligious and materialist outlook. Since many of the hill people in the Autonomous Districts of Assam State are already Christian, the tribesmen of NEFA could then be united with them in one Frontier State, in which there would be a natural religious unity and no place for communal dissension. In any case, the educated will not retain their old religion.

I do not see why this should be so. Indeed the very assumption suggests that, however much we may protest to the contrary and even accept consciously, there is a deep-rooted belief in the subconscious that whatever is tribal is somehow inferior.

But a careful study of tribal religion, both in NEFA and elsewhere, does not suggest that it is noticeably inferior to its competitors. It has its drawbacks, it is not fully thought out, there are many problems to which it has no answer. But as a working way of life it brings consolation to its adherents and gives them hope and courage.

The religious systems of NEFA have five qualities which, in so far as it is possible to measure these things at all, are of fundamental value.

1. There is a very general belief in a Supreme God who is just, benevolent and good. For example, Doim-Pollo, the Sun-Moon god of all the Adi groups, is regarded as the great witness in the sky, the splendour of truth. Let us go to one of the most primitive of the tribes for an opinion. In the Sipi Valley I



noted down the terms of an invocation which a Tugin priest addressed to Dami-Pofo in the course of a test to determine whether someone was a thief or not:

You are the greatest of all; you are above all; you see all. You see the lost things, the stolen things. At night, you watch the world of the dead. In the day, from the world below, having feasted well, you come in your finest clothes, with splendid ornaments, a shining dao in your hand. You look on every side; you know everything.

Although this august being does not seem to have created the world, he reigns unchallenged in the heavens; he is 'the eye of the world'; he is as important to man as the eye is to the body. He watches everything; he is the witness of truth; he shows men the way to go; he protects them; he treats them with mercy. Above all, he is the lord of truth and an oath taken on his name is the most binding of all. Though he is not offered special sacrifices, for he does not need them, his name is invoked on every ritual occasion. He is the unifying force behind popular religion from the Ssang to the Upper Kama and perhaps beyond, and it may well be that he will provide a basis whereby Adi religion can develop along the lines of the Truth and Goodness which are his most conspicuous attributes. After all, the Son is a very ancient god<sup>1</sup> and has been worshipped by comparatively sophisticated civilizations.

Similar notions are held by other tribal groups, though sometimes we find, as in Wancho and Konyak thought, that the benevolent Sky-god is opposed by a malevolent Earth-god; earthquakes are caused by the titanic wars between them.

One more example may be given. Clungtha-Sangyat seems to be a pre-Buddhist deity still worshipped by the Sherdukpen, who have developed an interesting synthesis of Buddhist and tribal ideas. Clungtha-Sangyat's chief quality is his mercy and pity for mankind. He delivers a young hero who calls on him in his despair. He saves a magic deer threatened with poison and removes the evil from its body. Although he is neither omniscient nor omnipotent, he is great, powerful and benevolent.

<sup>1</sup>There is a good deal of confusion about the sex of the Son, which some tribes regard as feminine.

Surely there is no reason why an educated tribesman should be ashamed of ideas such as these.

It is true that beneath these mighty rulers of the unseen world there is a host of demons and huries who prey upon mankind. But similar conceptions are to be found in popular Hinduism today, and for centuries the subtle wings of Satan overshadowed the mean teachings of Jesus Christ.

2. In the second place, there is in tribal religion a genuine emphasis on the spiritual realities behind the life of everyday. The belief in a circumambient unseen world, in which gods and men, the quick and the dead, are one great family; the faith in kindly tutelary spirits, to whom prayers are married; the emphasis on the spiritual cause of tragedy—these things do at least point the way from a merely material and temporal estimate of life, and lay the foundations for a development of higher values.

3. Then tribal religion is built up from an elaborate mythology. An American writer has recently pointed out that myth, at its best, 'is to be regarded as a recognition of the drama of human existence. Its ultimate aim is not the wishful distortion of the world, but rather serious comprehension and engagement of its fundamental nature. Myth is regarded as representing metaphysically a world-picture and insight into life generally and may, therefore, be considered as primitive philosophy or metaphysical thought.' If this is true, as I think it is, it means that the NEFA tribes have their own philosophy of religion, even though it is expressed in poetic or metaphorical form. In the tribal Puranas, as we may call them, we find a strong sense of history, a pride in the descent of the race from a great ancestor, the record of heroic deeds and, most interestingly, traces of a belief in the value of supreme self-sacrifice for the good of mankind. A noble king dies out of pity for the sufferings of men and thus brings the boon of death to the world. A great personage, on whose lifey urn once lived, dies for fear that he may injure his tenants. A tree falls and dies so that by its death the earth and sky may be perfected. The idea is crudely expressed; yet this deep and noble ideal is there, that one may die that all may live.

4. Tribal religion is associated with a social ethic that unites the tribe in its discipline and undoubtedly makes for a certain nobility of conduct. The great tribal virtues are discipline, devo-

tion to work, generosity and hospitality, truth, kindness. Many tribes, while permitting considerable freedom to the unmarried, insist on a high standard of marital fidelity. The folk-tales of the tribes that have come under Buddhist influence stress the gentle virtues of mercy and compassion.



An Ida Michani joken

This ethic is not related to the religion in the sense that virtue will normally be rewarded and vice punished in the after-life.



But the absence of an eschatology of rewards and punishments is no disadvantage; it rather links tribal religion with the most advanced ethical and religious systems.

3. Finally, tribal religion gives the people the power to reconcile themselves to the eternal emergencies of life. It has been said that fear is the father of religion and here its half-born daughter, and it is true that there is an element of fear in all primitive religions. But this is true also of the great world religions, and a celebrated psychologist has pointed out that a merely 'healthy-minded' and optimistic religion may prove inadequate when faced with the deeper tragedies of existence.

In their religion, the tribesmen have created a realistic picture of life seen *sub specie aeternitatis*; they face it, in all its dismal trappings, with courage; yet it is not fear of things as they are, but a heroic appreciation of them which has brought it into being. The tribesmen are realists; till recently they lived a life of constant anxiety and they projected this onto the wider canvas of their theology. Today, as they discover a more friendly world on earth, they may come to believe in a kinder world in heaven.

Above all, the tribesmen have faced the problem of death; they have not solved it any more than we have solved it; but they have devised means whereby it can be made more tolerable. The lengthy course of funereal ceremonial, the elaborate tombs, the carvings, the feasts of mourning are not due only to a desire to propitiate the ghost; they give the mourners an opportunity of separating themselves psychologically from the departed object, always a protracted and painful process. Modern psychology suggests that their efforts are well adapted to this end.

The tribesmen believe in a life after death and that living and dead continue to be united in one family.

Such are the advantages of tribal religion. On the other hand, it may be argued that this type of faith has given sanction to practices that are now universally condemned, such as head-hunting and human sacrifice. This, of course, is true and it must be admitted that the suppression of these practices has left a serious cultural and religious gap in the life of the Naga groups.

It is hard for anyone to approach this subject with complete objectivity. The Hindu, despite himself, considers whether the tribal religions cannot in some way be brought within the all-



Ceremonial chariot of a Khumtö Buddhist festival





Lama band at Monkhutsa accompanies dances which have a religious purpose



enhancing tolerance of Hinduism; the Christian cannot help regarding them as rivals to his own universal faith; the agnostic looks on all religions, tribal as well as others, as bound to collapse before the spread of scientific knowledge.

In their pictures of the future, Huxley, Foster and Orwell (to name no others) give us a world in which religion, in least as we understand it, has no place; C. S. Lewis, on the other hand, believes that the Christian religion will in the end triumph over science and pictures a female Pope reigning on the planet Mars. At present, whatever the rationalists may say, there is every sign that science is not in fact destroying religious faith. The extraordinary success of 'Moral Re-armament' in the scientific west and the swing towards religion in the ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge suggests that the human mind is incurably religious.

Tribal religion, developed and reformed from within, is thus not bound to be destroyed by science.

In one of his rare utterances on tribal problems, Mahatma Gandhi urged that the tribesmen should be persuaded to abolish animal sacrifice and the use of alcohol in worship. It is probably true that these are the main features which divide the tribal from other religions in India. Yet, although there is much to be done in the way of teaching the tribesmen to kill their animals before the altar more mercifully, the general practice of animal sacrifice is more innocuous than it sounds. In 'civilized' life, one's meat is provided by the butcher; in tribal life, it is provided by the clergyman. The sacrifice is a sacrament, where the people eat in the name of the gods. To give the sanction of religion to the eating of meat may offend the vegetarian, but it surely cannot be regarded as offensive to the religious spirit.

I submit, therefore, that we should not be defeated about tribal religion. It is worthy of preservation; I believe that it contains the seeds of growth. Anyone who reads Sir James Frazer's *Folklore of the Old Testament* may see from what humble beginnings two of the great world-religions have developed. A study, says Frazer, of the elements that underlay the civilization of ancient Israel, as they underlie the civilization of modern Europe, serves as a foil to enhance by contrast the glory of a people which, from such dark depths of ignorance and cruelty, could rise to such

brilliant heights of wisdom and virtue, as sunbeams appear to shine with a greater effulgence of beauty when they break through the murky clouds of a winter evening than when they flood the earth from the serene splendour of a summer noon.'

The essential point in this new attitude is that we should no longer assume that as the tribal people become educated and enter into contact with the outside world, they are necessarily bound to abandon their traditional faith. It has previously been supposed that an educated tribesman is almost inevitably bound to become a Hindu or a Christian. Today we feel that, while he is of course at perfect liberty to change his religion if he so desires, it need not be necessary for him to do so. The deeper study of the tribal religions outlined in the previous pages shows that they have many elements that satisfy the heart, even though, like other religions, they have other elements which do not satisfy the mind. We should be able to provide a climate in which the old religions can grow and reform themselves *from within* so that ultimately there will be in NEFA religious concepts that will be truly in character, yet having a wider view and a purer conception of God and man.

If this is to be achieved, there are certain things that every official and social worker in the tribal areas should do:

(i) The first is that he should study and try to understand the religion of the areas where he lives. This is not only a fascinating pastime but, if it is done with tact and sincerity, will in itself help to encourage the tribal people in their faith.

(ii) The second is that he should extend to tribal religion that attitude of sincere respect which we are trying to give to tribal life and institutions generally. He should never on any account ridicule or laugh at any tribal ceremony or belief. Sometimes the work of a well-trained higher officer may be completely undone by the ignorant folly of a clerk or a jawan. Should he be present at any tribal ceremony, he should show the same reverence that he would show in a Christian church or Hindu temple.

(iii) He should be careful how he talks and about the words he uses. Let us banish such expressions as 'superstition', 'heathen', 'devil dance' in relation to religion, just as we are trying to avoid generally such words as 'backward', 'uplift' and other patronising expressions. We should not speak of 'animism' but of the 'Wancho

religion' or the 'Aid religion', which will suggest that the tribal faith has for its adherents just as much authority and dignity as the faith of the outside world.



Mongers at a Mikmi tank

(iv) Whenever we refer to the Supreme Being, or administer oaths, we should use the local name. Some simple prayers might be composed in the tribal languages, and in time the Research Department will, we hope, give us accounts of the chief religions, which can be translated and will help to create that feeling of dignity and confidence in one's own culture, which is a secret of tribal vitality. A collection of myths and legends has already been published and the mythological treasury of the NEFA tribes may well come to have for their modern educated youth the same



sort of authority and provide the same kind of inspiration that the Book of Genesis and the great Hindu epics have for modern Christians and Hindus. We do not take the myths literally, but we recognize their symbolical importance and that they supply some deep need of the human heart.

This matter is summed up in some wise words of Mr. Jairamdas Daulatram:

'Just as Hindu society in Assam recoiled against the approach of the Christian proselytizing programmes, so also will one day the tribal people recoil against our approach to them, if we fail to understand their life and culture in their true light and miss the spirit of their belief simply because its forms and terms seem to be different from what we are familiar with. We must shed our subtle sense of superiority which makes us picture ourselves as "reformers", commissioned to work for the uplift of the backward tribes. . . . The people of the hills to the north and the south of the Brahmaputra are no more animist than the Hindus of the Assam Valley.'

This is the fundamental need—to create the right mental climate in which alone the tribal faith can flourish. No one will take the trouble to revive something he has learnt to despise. As Mr. Jairamdas Daulatram says again: 'It needs a sympathetic atmosphere to mature and develop this germinal idea into a powerful source of spiritual inspiration which can model tribal life on an even higher level.'

Some such attitude as this is the basis of the Administration's attitude to missionaries of all religions. It has been accused of being anti-Christian because it refuses to allow the Baptist missionaries to pass the Inner Line and has put certain restrictions on the building of churches and proselytizing. Nothing could be further from the truth. The NEFA Administration observes a policy of strict religious neutrality and would not impose even tribal religion on those who do not want it. It takes exactly the same attitude to Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim missionaries as it does to Christian missionaries.

For example, the Administration has insisted that the songs and hymns sung in the schools should be of a neutral character. The Prime Minister has noted that even the well-known hymn 'Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram' is 'totally inappropriate' for the NEFA

schools and this, along with others far more inappropriate, is no longer taught.

No one can withhold his admiration for the medical and educational work of the missionaries, Indian or foreign, of whatever religion they may be, for they are devoted and sincere. But in the frontier areas, it has been felt wise not to disturb the people with new forms of religion which may puzzle them and which may even compete with one another for their allegiance. It has also been found in practice that the effect of some of the foreign missions on the tribes of eastern India has been to create a separatist mentality, both towards India and among the people themselves. A doctrine, far from typical of modern Christianity in most parts of the world, that draws the sharpest of distinctions between the convert and the 'heathen', between the saved and the damned, and that insists that Christians should keep themselves apart from non-Christians, results in an essentially separatist, a xenophobic psychology, which has in many places manifested itself both in social life and politics. The political effect on the convert is to diminish his enthusiasm for India and its culture, the social effect is to isolate him from his non-Christian brethren in the villages. In Manipur separate Christian hamlets have been established, resulting in disputes and litigation about land. In return the non-Christians sometimes insist on the Christians living separately, in view of the fact that the latter refuse to observe the traditional taboos, at which the others, believing that this brings bad luck to the village, are naturally resentful.

Hindu reformers, who teach vegetarianism and testotanism, as well as a number of other taboos and customs hitherto unknown to tribal society, are equally destructive of village unity.

The cultural effect of missionary teaching of a certain kind has been fully described in a note in the Census of India 1931, an official document which may be quoted here, though it does not, of course, refer to the NEFA area. The reader should bear in mind that the British Government of the day had no prejudice against missions as such, rather the opposite. It is the cultural, not the religious aspect which is being considered.

Realising that on the preservation of customs developed exactly to fit the environment and tested by centuries of use depends the whole fabric of tribal society, Government has been at pains to



preserve them to the utmost limit possible and the ensure that such change as much inevitably come shall not be destructive in its suddenness.

To strong contrast has been the attitude of the American Baptist Mission. As religion plays a part in every Naga ceremony and as that religion is not Christianity, every ceremony must go. Such ceremonies as the great Feast of Moet, at which the whole village, rich and poor alike, is entertained, and of which the religious aspect is far less important than the social, have not been remodelled on Christian lines, but have been strictly abolished among converts. This has been the fate, too, of all village sacrificial feasts. The place of these is not adequately taken by small parties meeting to drink tea.

The suppression among Baptists of the ancient feasts in which all joined is not only a loss to the would-be hosts, but to the village as a whole, and not least to the poor, who always get their full share of good cheer at such feasts. To abolish these feasts is to do away with the very few occasions on which the awful monotony of village life is broken. They are, too, the natural Naga and Kuki way of distributing wealth. I have heard a Baptist teacher boast that his granaries were so full of the store of years that some of the grain was black with age. Had he been a Naga that grain would not have been left to rot uselessly but would have been eaten by his fellow-villagers.

It is at the big feasts that singing and dancing are indulged in and full dress worn. These have been entirely suppressed among the An, Lhota and Sema Christians, the men of whom wear no ornaments at all, having stripped their heads from the necks, their ivory armbands from their arms and even the cotton wool from their ears. The women are more conservative and still often wear their beads, though I doubt if a girl would actually wear her ornaments at a Mission school. Angami men too are difficult to dislodge from their ancient ways. The best of them do not give up their picturesque dress and are quite ready to put on all their finery and take part in the ceremonial singing parties which are such a feature of their village life.

Of the material arts in these hills wood-carving is the chief. It is displayed in the houses of those who have given the great Feast of Moet, on the morning posts of the An, Konyak and Lhotas, and on the big xylophones of the Aos. This is doomed to extinction as the power of the mission increases. Feast of Moet are forbidden among them, and no attempt is made to induce rich Christians to decorate their houses in the old way. No Christian boy is allowed to go through his time in the Morning and these are not built any more in Christian villages. In such villages, too the old xylophones can be seen rotting in the jungle.



The suppression of the wearing of all ornaments or tribal dress, of dancing, of singing (except hymns), of village fairs and of all artistic outlet is spreading an unmistakable darkness over village life. Old songs and old traditions are being rapidly forgotten. Told year in and year out that all the past history, all the struggles, all the old customs of his tribe are wholly evil, the Naga tends to despise his own race, and no night of the soul is blacker than that.

The suppression of the Morning, in which young Nagas learn to be useful citizens, is unwarranted by any good reason that I have ever heard. It is part of the tendency to abolish old things just because they are old, and substitute for the strong communal feeling which has enabled the tribes to survive for so long an individualism which is really foreign to them. Not only is this individualism wrapped up with the strong emphasis on personal salvation; it is also the direct and natural reaction against the destruction of all the old things that mattered in village life and all the old expressions of the artistic and social genius of the tribe.

We need not agree with every detail of this criticism, but we would do well to take warning from it. It is true that it deals mainly with the culturally destructive activities of a particular mission. But we should remember that administrative and development activities, if wrongly directed, or missions of other religions, can be just as inimical to the true spirit of tribal life.

The subject is far from easy, and I have not written this in any controversial spirit, still less out of any prejudice against the tribal Christians, who are splendid people and are, as Mr Nehru has said, as truly Indian as any others. But Christian communalism can be as dangerous as Hindu or Muslim communalism. If the Christians can shed their separatist ideas and revive those aspects of their traditional culture which do not run counter to the true teachings of their religion, they will make the most valuable contribution to the country, for they are a vital and progressive community.

But three things do seem to me to be wrong: that the obsolete theological divisions and controversies of the western world should be introduced into the tribal areas as a result of multiplying different missions and churches; that young children, before they have reached an age when they can think things out for themselves, should be proselytized; and that officials, servants of a

secular State, should use their position to promote their own religion, whatever that may be.

One thing is certain. The people of NEPA, and of all the tribal areas throughout India, are making rapid progress in material prosperity, but this prosperity may be positively dangerous unless there is a parallel spiritual and ethical revival. We see this in the modern world, where science has placed in the hands of man tools of such power that he may destroy himself unless he can develop the idealistic side of his character so that he can use them wisely. In his tract on 'The Convention of Contra', the poet Wordsworth deplores the fact that 'while mechanic arts, manufactures, agriculture, commerce have every day been putting on more brilliant colours, the splendour of the Imagination has been fading.'

'Animal comforts,' he continues, 'have been rejoiced over, as if they were the end of being. A country may advance, for some time, in this course with apparent profit: these accommodations, by restless encouragement, may be attained: and still the Peasant or Artisan, their master, be a slave in mind; a slave rendered even more abject by the very tenure under which these possessions are held: and if they veil from us this fact, or reconcile us to it, they are worse than worthless. Not by bread alone is the life of Man sustained; not by raiment alone is he warmed;—but by the genial and vernal inmate of the breast, which at once pushes forth and cherishes by self-support and self-sufficing endeavours; by anticipations, apprehensions, and active remembrances; by elasticity under insult, and firm resistance to injury; by joy, and by love; by pride which his imagination gathers in from afar; by patience, because life wants not promises; by admiration; by gratitude which—detaching him not when his fellow-being is its object—habitually expands itself, for his elevation, in complacency towards his Creator.'

## Chapter Seven

### SOCIAL AIMS IN NEPA

*The tribes should develop their own culture and make their contribution to the cultural richness of the country. It is unnecessary to cause them to change their customs, habits or traditions so far as to make themselves indistinguishable from other classes. To do so would be to rob rural and pastoral life of its colour and stimulating diversity.*

—PANDIT G. B. PANT

It is presumptuous, and it may be positively dangerous, to interfere with the social life and organisation of populations which differ greatly from ourselves, for not only may we make mistakes through ignorance, but we may—as Mr Nehru has warned us—in our eagerness to do good, do grievous harm instead.

In a recent UNESCO publication, *Interrrelations of Cultures*, the distinguished French scholar, M. Griaule, has stressed the dangers of interference with tribal culture and traditions:

*'Whatever interferes with them is likely to harm the unconscious. To hustle them in order to get through stages of technical development more quickly and to make a clean sweep of institutions and beliefs on the ground that they impede progress, is to create repression and traumas which may have catastrophic results for whole nations.'*

And Mr Nehru has frequently insisted that 'we have to refrain from interfering with their customs which bring grace and joy to their lives. At the same time we have to help them to grow according to their own genius and culture. Nothing would be more unfortunate than to try to impose ourselves upon them in any way.'

I have already quoted the words of Gandhiji when some of his followers in South Africa complained to him about African nudity. 'When a large society follows a particular custom, it is quite possible that the custom is harmless enough even if it seems highly improper to the members of another society.'



But there are certain matters where Government has been compelled to intervene.

### *Law and Order*

Perhaps the most important of these is in regard to Law and Order. For centuries the people of NEFA have lived in a constant state of inter-tribal and inter-village war; they have had a long history of crisis and anxiety. In Tins head-hunting was the order of the day and human sacrifice was not unknown; ferocious inter-village conflicts, kidnapping raids, cruel imprisonments and executions marred the peace of Lohit, Siang and Subanini; a form of head-hunting among the Mishmis, of hand-hunting among the western Dailas has been recorded. Women and children could not go abroad without an escort and the noise of war hung heavily above the workers in the fields. Obviously this could not continue and Government has had to bring head-hunting to an end; it has had to stop the kidnapping of children as slaves, check the smuggling of opium, put a stop to cruel punishments and prevent human sacrifice.

In 1931 Mr J. P. Mills wrote, in one of the *Census of India Reports*, an interesting note which presumably represented the official attitude of the day.

‘Only two ancient customs have had to be put down by Government: the sacrifice of mithuns by cruel methods, and head-hunting. The suppression of the first is wholly good, and more humane methods of killing can be substituted without detriment to the rites.

‘The suppression of head-hunting, though necessary in any area which is fully administered, has probably not been for the benefit of the tribes. The very fact that, far from being an honour, it is a disgrace to be killed in war, makes all Nagas very careful of their own safety, and their wars were singularly innocuous affairs. In a war between two big villages each side might lose one or two men a year.

‘The number of lives saved by the suppression of the practice is therefore negligible, and is far more than balanced by those lost through the spread of disease made easy by safe travelling everywhere. In addition to this there is a very real loss in virility and keenness. Unbroken peace is no better for Nagas than it is for any other race.’

I find it hard to agree with this. It is true that the suppression of head-hunting, which was closely inter-related with many aspects of Naga culture, will mean an inevitable decay in certain types of dance, personal ornamentation and tattooing, wood-carving and funerary ceremonial. Yet there are more important things than 'culture' and I believe that the greatest gift—and that too the gift most appreciated—which the Administration has brought to NEPA is the gift of peace. Today women and children go freely and happily about the countryside, former enemies feast together in amity, communications are open, and the idea of inter-tribal and inter-village co-operation is spreading.

In the classic head-hunting areas of Tipu and Tuensang, war retains its hold on the imagination of the elder men and the warrior is still honoured. He is still honoured also in parts of Siang, where special totems are made for those who have killed their enemies in battle; one or more guards cut with holes to represent eyes, nose and mouth, are hung up to symbolize the heads of slaughtered foes.

But the point is that everywhere the people have accepted the idea that head-hunting is against the law, that the days of inter-village wars are over, and that, although friendship and peace may be a little dull, they bring great and lasting benefits. After all, in our own society, we have long since outlawed murder, theft and rape. Yet murders, thefts and rapes occur. But they are the exceptions and not the rule; they are not part of our socially recognised activity. Head-hunting and war are social outlaws today, and this is the great, the almost miraculous, change that has been brought about by the Administration in so short a time. There may well be occasional lapses, but these will not detract from the importance of the main achievement.

Another greatly-treasured gift of the Administration is the lifting of the fear of economic exploitation. There must be few places in the world where such great pains are taken to ensure that 'primitive' people get a square deal. Land is protected, prices are controlled, money-lending is checked, shop-keepers are licenced. The domination of weaker by stronger and more aggressive tribal groups is being brought to an end. The Sherdukpens of Kameng, for example, were previously taxed by their neighbours. They were frequently raided and had to provide free



portage and supplies to touring officers and the Chiefs of other tribes. The raising of this burden has brought about a great material and psychological change. The Bugana also, who for generations had endured a kind of servitude to the Akas, have found a new freedom. The Mampas of Tavang and the Targans of northern Siang no longer suffer from the exactions and oppression of former days. In many, if not all, parts of NEEA the clouds of fear have been blown away.



Wooden ornament worn by a successful head-hunter.

But there is an element of truth in Mr Mills' opinion and we must be careful to see that there is no psychological vacuum caused by the disappearance of so absorbing an interest as war.

Suppose that the Great Powers of the world suddenly disbanded all their armed forces and destroyed their weapons, resolved to



live at peace with one another. Consider the result of this—the lifting of the burden of fear, the enormous economic gain and consequent release of human energies for scientific and social progress, but at the same time the wide-spread unemployment, the disappearance of the colour and romance of military parades, and possibly the loss of the virile virtues of courage, discipline, physical hardness and the spirit of adventure.

Is there any way of filling the gap? There are, of course, many new interests which have attracted some of the people. There are opportunities for trade; there is a great deal of work to be done in road-making and building. There are new diversions and activities introduced by the Administration. Yet so deep-rooted a tradition as head-hunting will not be forgotten in a few years. When the British Government stopped human sacrifice among the Konds of Orissa they persuaded the people to sacrifice buffaloes instead. In New Guinea, where one of the tribes regarded the taking of a human head as an essential prelude to marriage, the tribesmen were persuaded to substitute the head of a wild boar. To secure this, says Raymond Firth, 'meant initiative and courage on the part of the aspirant to marriage and satisfied the tribal rule while putting an end to the disruptive acts of head-hunting.' A similar attempt among the Konyaks some time ago was less successful. It was suggested that they should take monkey instead of human heads and they agreed to try. Unfortunately, a severe epidemic broke out shortly afterwards and that year the crops failed, and the Konyaks decided that such synthetic substitutes would not work.

The Konyaks and Wanchos, however, have themselves evolved an alternative technique. These tribes rule that a young man cannot be married until he has been tattooed and he cannot be tattooed until he has been on a head-hunting expedition. When head-hunting stopped there was naturally a serious problem how to get tattooed and then married. Wooden images of the human figure, decorated with the appropriate tattoo marks and ornaments, were made and hidden in a forest belonging to a hereditary enemy. The young men then went out in all their finery to 'hunt' the image, cut off its head and brought it back in triumph. There was dancing and a feast and the traditional ceremonies of victory were performed. After this the boys could be tattooed and then

married. In some villages it was considered sufficient to 'raid' the territory of another village and bring back shrubs and bushes, which probably symbolised human hair. Such ways of 'letting off steam' and satisfying a fundamental urge are by all means to be encouraged.

It will be of great sociological interest to watch the results of the change-over from a society organised for war to one geared to the arts of peace. It is bound to have its effect not only on economics, making possible a great advance in agriculture, but even on such matters as the siting of villages (there is no longer any reason for building them far from the water-supply, on the tops of hills), on dress (which no longer requires to be a sort of armour) and on such arts as carving and the dance, which in some areas were largely inspired by warlike motifs.

### *The Assam Rifles*

NEFA is fortunate in having in the Assam Rifles an ideal force, whose men have been described as 'the custodians of law and order, the pioneers of every advance into the interior, the guardians of our borders and, above all, the friends of the hill-people.' Themselves largely recruited from the sub-Himalayan population, they have a natural and instinctive understanding of the NEFA tribesmen, and their approach and conduct is in refreshing contrast to that of the forces of law and order in other parts of tribal India, where for many years I myself witnessed the devastating psychological and economic effect of the behaviour of the low-grade police.

In some States, to be sent to a tribal area was regarded as a punishment and only policemen who had misbehaved elsewhere were sent there. Far from effective supervision, Sub-Inspectors and constables wrought havoc among the simple tribal people. Corruption, extortion, petty tyranny of every kind, constant demands for free food, free portage and free labour were the order of the day, and those who should have saved the peasants from fear were the chief agents in creating it.

Very different is the situation in NEFA, where a tradition of the highest consideration for the tribal people has been established by the men of the Assam Rifles. Modestly, and without fuss, they have faced every possible hardship and difficulty, and there-



hundreds of villagers in the wildest areas think of them with affection and gratitude. May they long continue to provide the foundations of security and order in the NEFA mountains!

### *Slavery*

Slavery is a heritage from the past which will have to go, and which in fact is already disappearing.

The Government of India is a contracting party to the Slavery Convention of 1926 (though it was only in 1938 that its provisions were applied to the NEFA area), whereby it agreed to bring about progressively and as soon as possible the disappearance of slavery in every form. The British Government, while doing all it could by persuasion to achieve this aim, took the line that it was impracticable to enforce anti-slavery provisions in places that were not under full administration. It gave shelter, however, to slaves who escaped into settled territory and occasionally even paid compensation for them. Before Independence, however, progress was very slow, except among the Mityongs of Sang where slavery was completely eliminated.

What is a slave? He is someone who is the property of another person and entirely subject to him. He has to live with and work for someone else, often (at least at first) against his will. His children have the same fate and they, like him, can be bought and sold.

People became slaves for a number of reasons. They were captured in war. They were purchased. They were used to repay a debt. Many were born slaves. Sometimes a man became a slave because he had committed a serious offence against the community and could not afford the fine demanded. The Sallungs are almost a slave tribe.

Slavery in the fullest sense of the word has existed from time immemorial in NEFA, but it is somewhat different from what once was practised in the west. In the first place, it is on a comparatively small scale. It is estimated that some millions of slaves were imported into America during the period of the African slave-trade. In the whole of NEFA there are only a few thousand slaves, many of them in the lightly administered areas. Ten years ago, the slave population of the Lohit Valley was not more than two hundred.



Secondly, there is no racialism in NEFA slavery. Western slavery took a darker tinge from the prevailing theory of the racial inequality of the slaves. Negatives, it was held, were only part human; by becoming slaves they were expiating the sin of their fathers; they did not deserve the elementary human rights; even a freed slave was irrevocably an inferior being. Yet many of the American slaves were in practice well-treated as members of the family, and one of the arguments used by the anti-Abolitionists was that the Negroes *liked* being slaves and would only be unhappy if they were liberated.

In NEFA too slaves often win a good position in their masters' houses, and naturally, after a period of years, come to be accepted as members of the family. The owner provides his slave with food, clothing and shelter; he arranges his marriage and pays the bride-price. In some areas a slave is allowed to keep part of any earnings he may receive.

But, as in America, there is a strong taboo on social and sexual relations between slave and free. As in America, there is an emphasis laid in the social inferiority of slaves, and even a freed slave, though he may become headman of his village, is forever barred from marriage with a girl of a free family. The status of a slave is suggested by the use of such words as 'dog' or 'fowl' to describe him—a dog or a fowl is something that is entirely in your power; you can sell or otherwise dispose of it as you will.

A slave by definition is something that can be bought and sold. Many NEFA slaves were used as merchandise, and in the course of a lifetime were bought and sold a dozen times. It is thus incorrect to say that there is no real slavery in NEFA and that the slaves should be called *serfs*.

It is true that slaves may, in many places, run themselves if they can find the necessary money. There is already a movement, inspired by the new ideas of human brotherhood, for slaves to demand their freedom; they are trying to escape in greater numbers than formerly, and some slave-owners are seriously perturbed about the situation. The matter is complicated by the fact that a number of tribal employees, such as Political Jamadars, and headmen who are recognised by Government, themselves keep slaves, sometimes on a rather large scale.

Since Independence, in all areas that are fully administered,

Government has aimed at stopping traffic in slaves, the export of slaves across the borders of Tibet or Burma, and the capture of persons for the extortion of ransom. This has been almost entirely successful. The release of existing slaves, who have had this status for generations or on whom their masters have spent a good deal of money, is more complicated.

Every individual liberation is a delicate matter, demanding the attention of a responsible officer who has to conduct complicated financial arrangements. Most, though not all, of the slaves, are in remote areas where it would be undesirable at the moment to cause economic or political disturbances. But the slave-problem is on everyone's mind and it is being solved, slowly it is true, but none the less surely. In recent years 79 slaves have been freed in the Sikkim Division, 6 in Kameng, some hundreds in Simga and 32 in Lohit. In some cases, liberated slaves have continued to work for their former masters with a new status, of their own free will. In other cases they have been helped to find a livelihood and settle down as free members of society.

There are three ways of approach to freedom. One is the business-way. Even though they may have little idea of money, all tribal people are very businesslike. The slave-owners pay considerable sums for the purchase of their slaves; they spend money, sometimes quite generously, on their marriages and funerals; they buy them clothes and ornaments, weapons and tools; and they rather naturally feel that they must have some return for their investment. The Government of India has sanctioned a fairly large sum of money for the ransoming of slaves, though this has obviously to be used with caution; it has now been agreed that part of it may be spent on rehabilitating the slaves after their release.

The second method is through persistent but tactful propaganda. Meetings are held, individuals are persuaded; the people are told that slavery is against the law and against the whole idea of the free and peaceful land which NEFA has now become. And in particular they are asked, as a first step, to regard any child born after August 15th 1947 as free: no one born in a free India can be a slave.

The third way is taken by the slave himself. Gradually, over a number of years, he collects money; sometimes, when a kindly



master dies, he is left a little property; in the end he reaches a point where, with a certain amount of help, he can buy his freedom. A village council is held and, under the inspiration of local tribal officials, members of the same clan may supplement the contribution of Government (which cannot exceed a certain amount) and what can be produced by the slave himself in the way of cattle, ponies and ornaments, to effect release. Such freed slaves, as I have said, may attain quite a good position, some of them becoming headmen of their villages, but they are not admitted fully into society; the stigma remains and an ex-slave cannot ordinarily marry a freeborn girl.

There are then three things to do: the first is to effect the physical freedom of the slaves, the next to ensure that they have alternative employment or land (land is not a great difficulty in a farming community), the third to remove the stigma resting on the slaves and admit them into full membership of a free society.

Nothing will illustrate the realities of slavery in NEFA better than the following history of a Tagin slave-woman who has recently been liberated in the Bori area in the Siang Frontier Division.

### *The Story of Yanyong*

Yanyong was born in a Tagin village, Neli-Daring, and had two sisters and three brothers. When she was six years old she was betrothed and went to her husband's house when she was still very young. She had three daughters, of whom two died in infancy. One day when her youngest daughter was about four years old, she had a dream that a bird flew up into the sky and perched on one of the great swings that are erected to appease the Wiyu (demon) of dyerity and on which a number of boys were playing. Some people came by dragging a mithun by a rope. Yanyong understood this dream to mean that her husband would die, that her village would be raided and that she herself would be dragged away like a captive mithun.

After some time her father-in-law had a quarrel with another Tagin from Dollang village, and killed him. A little while afterwards the Dollang people came to take revenge. On the way they met Yanyong's husband, who had gone to the forest to collect leaves, and killed him. They came into the village and, though



Yanyong's father-in-law and the rest of the family managed to escape into the forest, she herself (who was carrying her baby on her back) and her husband's younger sister were captured.

As they were being dragged away Yanyong, who after all was still very young, sat on the ground refusing to move. But her enemies pulled her up by her necklaces and broke them. Then they tied her hands together and dragged her along, threatening to kill her until at last in despair she wept quietly. Her husband's younger sister, however, caused her captors so much trouble that half-way along the path they murdered her.

When Yanyong reached Dohlung she was put in the stocks, but only one foot was fastened because she had her baby and her enemies felt rather sorry for her. Otherwise, she says, she was well-treated and given the same food as her captors had. At first when she was being taken away from her own village she was full of spirit, furious with the other villagers for not rescuing her, and full of plans for escape. But once she had been put in the stocks she only had one thought and that was to save her life, no matter what kind of life that would be. The Tagins kept her in the stocks for three days and then took her to a Gallang village called Yama to sell her as a slave, for they were afraid that she would run away or her clansmen would come and rescue her. Accordingly, when they took her to Yama they took her by a very round-about path so that she would not be able to find her way back and this took four days. The Dohlung people were paid a mithun for Yanyong herself and various small things for the baby.

Yanyong remained a month in Yama and during that time her baby died. She recalls that she did not feel any particular shame at having become a slave, but she felt very lonely. To this of course was added the sorrow for the loss of her baby, whose death was probably hastened by the fact that she was given very bad food and made to work extremely hard. There was no one to look after the child and she had to carry her all the time on her back. When the baby fell ill her master refused to make any sacrifices for her. When the child died Yanyong herself had to dig the grave and carry the little body for burial, for not one of the Gallangs was willing to help her. She had been warned that this might happen by a dream in which she saw herself

throwing her clothes into a hole in the ground which she had made in the hope of getting water.

When the child died the Yama people thought that it would be now easy for Yanyong to make her escape and they took her accordingly to Yankang village.

Yanyong's price had now risen and the Yama people demanded three mithuns for her. In the house of the man at Yankang whom they hoped to sell her, there were already two other slaves and they pressed their owner to buy her because she could then be given to one of them as a wife, but he considered that the price was too high and only kept Yanyong in the house, on approval as it were, for three days. He finally decided not to have her and the Yama people took her from village to village trying to sell her. They went to the four villages of Miga, Hoga and Gupeng, and in Ganning a man bought her for two brown pigs, which were considered to be the equivalent of four mithuns.

When she was in Yankang, Yanyong began to realize what it meant to be a slave and felt so ashamed that she would not speak to anyone: she used to sit in a corner hiding her face in her hands. But after she reached Ganning she decided that after all she was alive and was getting food and shelter and that she might as well make the best of things. She began to work hard and recalls that she was not unhappy.

But after about a year the wife of the house began to give Yanyong a great deal of trouble. She did not treat her properly and continually abused her: 'Wife of a monkey', 'Wife of a bear', 'Wife of a dog', 'Wife of a rock', and this used to upset her so much that she thought: 'Let me die but not live like this'. After a time, however, she began to answer back and made life so unpleasant that her owner decided to sell her. He took her first to Gasheng, where he failed to find a purchaser, and then to Gatri. There one Tada Pangto bought her for three brown dishes and one mithun. Those three dishes were not old and valuable ones and were considered to be worth only about fifty rupees each.

After a time, however, Tada married his daughter to a man in Gasheng and sent Yanyong with her as a servant. While she was there the Doris offered a human sacrifice to check an epidemic of dysentery and Yanyong along with the others swallowed a



small piece of human flesh. But she was so revolted that she brought it up immediately.

Now in Gashang there was a young widower called Taping Pabing (Yanyong was living in the house of a member of the Pabing clan). Although he was a freeman he fell in love with Yanyong, who was very beautiful. When his clansmen discovered this they threatened to turn him out of the village and beat him for lowering the credit of their clan. Taping explained the situation to the girl and said that in any case he was in great danger: he would either be killed in the village or, if he ran away, he would die in the forest. Yanyong then proposed that they should run away together. So the two lovers, saying that they were going to work in the fields, quietly slipped away into the forest and, avoiding the regular tracks, made their way over the wild and desolate mountains for four days until they reached Pangkang. From there they went on to Karko. There they found service, but not of course as slaves, in a Minyong house and gradually built a house for themselves.

Shortly before the departure Yanyong had a dream that she had gone down into a hole in the ground and had travelled under the earth in darkness for many weary years until at last she came out into a place of light, where she saw Doini-Pulla, the Supreme Being, in his beauty. This is surely a fine symbol of a woman's escape from slavery into the light of freedom.

One day Tapik Pangu, the brother of Yanyong's former owner at Gato, came to Karko and asked Taping for having carried off a slave-girl. To this Taping replied that as Tapak was a Pangu and had given the girl to the Pabing clan, it was no business of his what a member of another clan did. Tapak held a Katsang council but was unable to do anything and went away. While Yanyong was at Karko the great earthquake occurred and this fixes the date of her stay there as 1950.

After a time Yanyong and her husband left Karko and went to the Beri village of Paying where they made a house and settled down. After a time, however, Taping fell ill with what may have been some kind of liver trouble. They called the priests and offered as many sacrifices as they could afford but to no effect. They went to Along for treatment but were asked to go down to Pasigbat. Taping remained in the Pasigbat hospital for a



month, but did not get better and so finally the couple went back to Paring.

Tapang's younger brother was living in Mega and Tapang thought that if he could be with one of his own relations he would get the help he needed. In Mega he himself was looked after well and given good food, but his relatives did not like Yanyong—who was after all a Targin while they were Boris—and his brother's wife used constantly to abuse her as a slave girl and a bitch and refused to give her the same food as her husband. She herself did not mind that particularly, but her husband resented it and said, 'I am not going to die in this house. Let me die in a Taring household and the Taring people will sacrifice a pig at my death and will provide cloth for my burial. When I am dead my wife will work for them and they will look after her.' A Keliang was held and Tapang was taken to a house of the Taring clan. On that very day, shortly after he reached his new home, he died. The Taring people did all that was required; one of them carried the body out for burial, they dug the grave, sacrificed a pig and provided cloth for the corpse.

After her husband's death Yanyong stayed in the house of the Taring people and worked for them, but not as a slave. She recalls that she had no trouble at that time except her natural sorrow for the loss of her husband. The one thing that troubled her was that she was free. But one day she dreamt that her father had gone to a certain village and bought a mithan. When he tied the rope round the animal's neck he found that it was not an animal but a man, whom he dragged back to his village. Soon afterwards Tapik Pango came to Mega and declared, 'This woman was my father's elder brother's slave and now belongs to me. The old man had sent this girl to Gachong to look after his daughter and she ran away from there, but she really belongs to me and I am going to take her back.' The Taring people protested at this, saying that Tapang had entrusted Yanyong to their care and they had performed all the business of the funeral. If Tapik wanted to take the girl away, they said, he would have to refund their expenses. Tapik finally gave a bronze dish (worth about twenty-five rupias), a cooking-pot worth about fifteen rupias, two rupias in cash and three seers of salt and for this trivial sum Yanyong was taken back into slavery.

When Yanyioung was taken away she was filled with despair and wanted to die. Her husband was dead and she was once more a slave, so what was the use of going on living?

Yanyioung stayed in Gatu for some time and then met Tage Pangu, a freed Tagin slave of Gasheng. He is a small and cheerful person, a very typical Tagin, and apparently had had some sort of affair with Yanyioung when she was in Gasheng some years before. Yanyioung disliked Gatte and with the added attraction of Tage, became very anxious to go and live in Gasheng.

So one day Yanyioung went to Gasheng to the headman, Tarang Paling, and told him how much she disliked Gatte and begged him to purchase her, promising to work well for him. Tarang was not at first willing to do this but she pressed him strongly and in the end he purchased her for one bronze pin said to be worth two millions, beads worth one million and a Tibetan coat. But later, Tarang became afraid that he might get into trouble with Government and when I myself visited the village, hurriedly demanded the things he had paid to Tapik and asked him to take Yanyioung back to his house.

From Gasheng, I brought Yanyioung with my party on the long journey to Along. Directly the Political Officer heard her story, he set in train measures for her liberation. Within a fortnight, as a result of the energy and tact of our interpreters, under the wise guidance of the P. O., she was liberated and entered into the world of light and beauty of the free.

### *The Story of Khumji*

Another story, about a youth whom we will call Khumji, illustrates the determination of a slave to free himself. This boy, who comes from an Aka village in western Kaimeng, had a Miji grandmother. At the time of one of the periodical wars between the Akas and Bangnis this woman, who was then pregnant with her first child, took refuge in the house of a wealthy Aka at Shurgaan, and he declared that he was willing to save her from her enemies, provided she took an oath that she and her descendants would serve him and his wife in perpetuity. She therefore swore by the Tiger, the Elephant and the Fish that she and the child in her womb would always serve in his house as slaves.



The child, a boy, was born and grew up and in due time his master arranged his marriage and paid for it. From this marriage came Khumji's father and the master arranged his marriage also when he grew up, and his wife gave birth to two children, Khumji himself and an elder sister. When Khumji was very young both his parents died, and when his sister grew up, her owners arranged her marriage with a Miji slave, and took the entire bride-price.

Khumji in turn grew up as a rather pathetic little boy; he went about in rags and had little to eat. He went to Nakhu village for his sister's marriage and, finding that a party of Mijis were going to Charduar, wept before them for his poverty. They clubbed together and contributed between them sufficient for him to buy a she-goat and Khumji, taking it with him, accompanied them to Charduar. He sold the goat there and with the proceeds bought himself clothes and a load of salt. When he returned to Buragau he exchanged the salt with an Aka for another she-goat. He looked after the animal very carefully and it produced many kids, each of which he sold and then went to Charduar and brought a silver ornament and some silk cloth. He took these to Nakhu and gave them to the sister-in-law of his mistress in Buragau (who was herself a Miji) who was living there. She was so pleased that she gave him a small mithun with horns the size of your hand. At this time he did various odd jobs for Government and with the money he earned went to Charduar again and bought ornaments, cloth and cooking-pots and on returning exchanged them for another mithun. Now he had two mithuns.

Then his mistress, who was now a widow, arranged his marriage and gave his wife, who was a Miji servant but not of the slave class, a necklace. He sold this necklace as well as a few other things and managed to get a she-mithun. This mithun he had to give to his mistress as her share of the earnings he had gained.

In the house of the headman at Humsigon, where they had all moved by now, there was a young slave-girl, hard-working and obedient, and Khumji determined to take her as his second wife. He gave the headman the two mithuns, a sheep and a pig for her.

Today Khumji and his two wives live in the house of his mistress at Humsigon, where there are now eight other slaves. She gives him a good deal of freedom, but the two women have to work for her all the time. He has two children, and he sold one



that they would also be slaves, both while he was alive and after his death.

Kluang is allowed to work for Government, on the roads or carrying loads, but has to hand over part of his earnings to his mistress. He has managed to save about a hundred rupees, with which he is already negotiating to buy another mithun. He pointed out to me that, supposing he was to obtain Government employment at Bomdi Lai, he would have to leave most of his wives to work in the house of his mistress and would only be able to take one of them with him. Even this he would only be able to do if his mistress was agreeable, for the power of the ancient oath by the Tiger, the Elephant and the Fish is still upon him and if he were to disobey her he would die. He said that he could get his freedom if a meeting was held and he could give his mistress a mithun and a certain sum of money. The procedure would then be for her to present him with a necklace and give him her blessing, after which he would be free.

I have told these stories at length for they show in a vivid way what slavery means and how the slaves can be redeemed. This is one of the most romantic and worth-while of the many opportunities for service facing us in NEFA, and we may confidently look forward to the day, in the not too distant future, when the whole of NEFA will—to use a famous phrase of the old anti-slavery movement—"be consecrated by the genius of universal emancipation".

### *Opium*

The taking of opium, which under the tolerant laissez-faire policy of the former regime, gained almost a stronghold over certain tribes, is another custom in which Government obviously has to interfere.

For its curse lies heavily on the border villages. It is an astonishing experience to travel along the Patkai Range from Rabo to Havel and see the fields of poppy overgrowing food-crops in the panna and the little opium-gardens behind almost every house. Without seeing it, it is not easy to imagine the extent of this cultivation, the energy expended on it and the care with which it is cherished. Opium is almost a form of currency; it may be part of a girl's bride-price; it may be used to pay a fine;

It is perhaps the most valuable of all tribal products for export or local trade. Some villages, like Wakka, cultivate opium only for sale; its hardy virile men sicken its overeating pleasures; but they grow it on a fairly large scale for their weaker neighbours.

It was agreed everywhere that opium-addiction was on the increase; it is now taken in the dormitories, where the young men have no longer to be alert in the new era of peace. Dr R. N. Chopra, who is our chief authority on opium addiction in India, found among patients examined by him that the habit had been contracted in 50 per cent of the cases by association with older smokers for its euphonic effects, in 33 per cent for relief of pain



*Carved wooden tobacco pipe used by the Wanchos of Tirap*

and sickness, and in 17 per cent to overcome worry and nerve-strain. Mishins of the Khanlang Valley, with whom I discussed the matter, laid chief emphasis on the spread of the habit through imitation: a group would be sitting round the fire, and one or two of the older men would have their pipes. It was only natural that the younger men should have a try, and having tried to be seduced by the pleasurable effect.

I think, however, that the cold and gloom of the climate must play its part, and it is significant that the highest incidence of opium-smoking occurs in those tribal groups whose culture is in the greatest state of decay. Life is dull, hard and boring, and the pipe offers all too easy an escape into a land of dreams.

Efforts have already been made, especially in the Singpho area and in the Borphuria villages, to wean the people from the habit and some success has been achieved. But the time has come for a determined and comprehensive programme to bring it to an end throughout NEFA.



The fear is sometimes expressed that vigorous action may have political repercussions. There was also the danger of political repercussions when head-hunting was stopped. But, in my opinion, opium-addiction is a greater evil even than head-hunting, which did not in practice lead to the loss of many lives (it is recorded, for example, that during sixteen years, in which two villages were in a constant state of war, only four heads were taken). Head-hunting fostered the martial virtues, it maintained a high degree of discipline; it was the inspiration of carving and weaving, the dance and song. But opium is the destruction of all these things. No art can flourish, no virtue or discipline can be maintained, no plans for development will be successful in the areas where this problem remains unsolved. The Noctes, Tanguas, Singphos and Mishmis addicted to opium are poor, thin, miserable, caught in a vicious circle so that the poorer they grow the more they turn to opium for relief, and the more they smoke the poorer they become. The narcotic drugs, says de Roques 'do not necessarily destroy life or impair intellect. They do reduce ambition, reduce sexual desire almost to vanishing point, produce a feeling of lethargy and encourage illness. Above all they enslave, and the slavery they impose is absolute.'

At one time during the British period there was some attempt to solve the problem by wholesale destruction of the poppy-crop. This policy was not successful and is not being tried today, though in a few places the people have destroyed the poppies of their own accord and planted food-crops instead. In all these matters propaganda is proving far more effective than the giving of orders or the use of force. The tribesmen are reasonable people, surprisingly reasonable, and they have a great respect for the Political Officers, who hold meetings of the village councils and ask the members themselves to make suggestions, thus leading them to feel that the programme is their's. The general tribal view is that, while the older men must be permitted to continue their opium smoking, for otherwise the loss of 'this disease which cures all diseases' will be intolerable, the younger men should at all costs be saved from it, and that poppy-cultivation should be gradually reduced and its introduction into areas where it is not known, such as the Dibang Valley, should be prohibited.

The ultimate solution will be through a vigorous positive pro-



grain— to bring prosperity and happiness to the affected villages, so that a new interest may drive out the old.

### *Rice-beer*

Alcohol, at least as it is known in NEFA, is in rather a different category. Some form of rice or millet beer holds an important place in the custom of all the tribes. It is an essential element in the tradition of hospitality which is one of the most admired of tribal virtues; it is an important element in the price paid for a bride; it is almost a medium of exchange; it fits its share in most religious rituals; no tribal conference can succeed without it; it is the pledge that binds together those who make a pact of peace.

But for all this the people of NEFA seldom drink to excess and it is rare to see a drunken man. Rice-beer is a food and, if it is to be taken in excess at all, it should be on some occasion of crisis or rejoicing—a wedding or a funeral, a harvest festival or (in former days) a victory over one's foes. The *spong* (beer) of the Adi has been studied by the Department of Anthropology which has found that, while the alcohol content is small, it enriches the nutritive value of the Adi diet approximately by 10 per cent of calories, 5.5 per cent of protein, 5.3 per cent of calcium, 11 per cent of phosphorus, 29 per cent of iron and 8 per cent of niacin, with the result that it has been found superior to the food of the average Indian peasant in all important nutrients.

Most of NEFA is at the stage of the early civilisations, when the distiller's art was unknown. The Greeks, says de Ropp, had no word for it. "The Romans knew nothing about it. This was just as well. Considering what pigs the old Romans made of themselves with wine, one dares not to think what would have happened had they had access to brandy. In the days of Nero, brandy, whisky, gin, and all their spirituous relatives lay safely folded in the womb of time, out of reach alike of emperor and slave. It was not until considerably later that some obscure alchemist, probably seeking the elixir of youth, placed wine in an alembic and produced a fiery distillate of which a mere thimbleful contained the intoxicating potency of a glassful of wine. Thus was mankind launched on the sea of spirit in which so many have since drowned not only their sorrows but themselves."

A certain amount of rice-spirit, however, is distilled in the cold northern regions, and is taken regularly, along with beer, by the Mospan and Sherdukpas, the Khambas and Membas. Some of the Mishmis and Khamptis also go in secretly for distillation, and there have been sporadic attempts to introduce it elsewhere. But the Administration has rightly set its face against distillation; it has been forbidden in the lower regions, and in the far north attempts are being made to wean the people from it by persuasion. In other parts of tribal India, this spirit (usually made there from the corolla of the *banus latifolia*) has been a curse to the tribesmen; it lacks the food-values of beer, and is far too potent to be taken with impunity.



Mospan Lama with gigantic *gigantik*

For the promotion of temperance in NEPA, we are trying to popularize tea, which is now taken eagerly by most of the people when they can get it, and tea-leaves are among the most acceptable of presents when on tour.

There is one rather special problem. The people are very hospitable and invariably press rice-beer on visitors to their

villagers. What should we do about this? If the visitor is not a teetotaler—and has a strong stomach—there is every reason for him to accept this simple and natural gift, in moderation, as a response to friendship. If he is a teetotaler, he might well follow the example of the former Governor of Assam, Mr. Jaganadas Daulatram, and take any drink offered him to his lips to show that he has no taboo in his mind and as a symbol of unity with his hosts.

It has been urged that if we do not drink, we shall cause offense. It has also been urged that in actual fact our refusal will not be seriously resented. I think that the danger of giving offense has certainly been exaggerated, but that is not really the point. The danger is not so much that we will offend the people as that we will create a feeling that we are alien to them. No one should ever, for example, say: 'It is against my custom or religion to take rice-beer.' In Kohima in 1955 Mr. Philo made capital out of the fact that a feast of pork and rice-beer offered to a distinguished Hindi visitor had not been acceptable. Here,\* he said, 'is a symbol of the unbridgeable gap between Nagaland and India.'

### *The Problem of Time*

It is not going to be easy for a comparatively small population to find sufficient working-hours in the year to fulfil all the demands that we are making upon it. This problem is already exerting some of the more thoughtful villagers in all Divisions. We call the people for portage, for road-making, for the construction and repair of bridges, to build official quarters. We ask them to send boys and girls, who would ordinarily be working in the fields, to schools, to the GTPC's, to enlist in the Army, to tour round India. We engage some of them as domestic servants or as Class IV officials or in the porter corps. We frequently have to amuse the headmen to headquarters, often from very distant places, on official business, for special occasions and to meet VIP's. Every officer who visits a village or tour distracts the people from their ordinary work; we now have Research Officers who require the elders to spend long hours giving them information; we engage the people to make recordings for broadcasts and pose before the camera for documentary films. And the burden of all this falls inevitably on the most enterprising and intelligent. Where, I have



often been asked not that, are we to find time for the agriculture which you tell us is our fundamental need?

I do not know what the solution of this problem is, but it is one that we should consider very seriously. There is a further difficulty inherent in tribal life itself: there are a number of customs which undoubtedly cause the people to waste a lot of time. The system of tobacco, for example, involves a tragic waste of man-hours, for throughout the year on every conceivable occasion the people are forbidden to work in the fields or go out of their villages. The present system of marriage is another great consumer of time, for a number of expeditions have to be made to a bride's home with appropriate gifts before the arrangements are complete. The Adivasi spend a quite disproportionate amount of their time in litigation; they are mighty talkers (the Boria say that an orator should have a tongue four yards long) and the proceedings of the Khabas are dragged on for days. The many days lost as a result of long journeys to buy salt and other necessities will, of course, gradually be saved as we make it possible for the tribesmen to buy their goods from local Government shops. Sickness is another enemy of time, for an attack of fever, which elsewhere would only incapacitate the invalid, in NEPA diverts an entire household, as well as priests and village elders, to the long-drawn ritual of appeasement of the deities of disease. What a doctor will do in ten minutes may take a tribal physician three days.

Formerly, none of this mattered very much, for the tribal people had plenty of time, and it provided an interest in life and filled up hours which might otherwise have been spent less profitably. But today, if the ideals and plans of the Second Five-Year Plan are to be implemented, everybody in NEPA will have to be on his toes, and there will not be a moment to waste.

#### *Other Problems*

In addition to these fundamental problems, there are others about which there is room for a difference of opinion, but with which, on the whole, it would be wise not to interfere. It will be a different matter if and when the people themselves wish to change, but that is something which we should neither encourage nor discourage. Let us sometimes realize that there are things

which are just not our business. We are not in NEFA as reformers, and the Prime Minister himself has deprecated the attitude that wishes to go about doing good.

There are two characters in the novels of Charles Dickens whom we would do well to study. One is Mrs Peggleg in *Black House*, the embodiment of 'rapacious benevolence'. She is 'businesslike and systematic': she has a 'mechanical way of taking possession of people'; she specialises in 'a knowledge of the poor' and a capacity for doing 'charitable business in general'; she makes 'a great show of moral determination'. And when she visits a brick-layer's house like 'an inexorable moral policeman' and lectures him on architecture, sanitation and 'improvement', the poor victim exclaims: 'I want an end of these liberties took with my place.'

A similar character is Mr Pumblechook, in *Great Expectations*, who could never see a small boy without trying to improve him by setting him problems in mental arithmetic. And I have little doubt that faced by the all too common self-conscious desire to uplift one's fellows, that hard professional inquisitive interference in other peoples' lives so characteristic of the social worker, tribal India's reaction is: 'I want an end of the liberties taken with my place.'

One of these problems concerns the dormitory, which exists among certain Naga groups, among the Sheshukpema and very widely in Siang. In the Minyong, Padam, Ashing and Beri villages, for example, there are separate dormitories for the boys and girls, which have the useful purpose of disciplining the youth of the tribe, promoting song and dance, and organising the boys and girls for various community services.

It has been reported from the Painghat area that in a few villages this system is now breaking down under the influence of the local schools. School-boys and dormitory-boys are known by different names and are growing into opposition to each other. Similarly in Tumsang the Morning-boys are often opposed to the Christian boys. We are now trying to change this and to make the schools and dormitories not rivals but allies. For the disappearance of the dormitories would mean, as it has meant when they have disappeared in similar cultures elsewhere, a general weakening of tribal discipline, a decay of the recreational arts and an increase of sexual promiscuity.





Mr K. L. Mohia is made welcome in a Tiap village





It is argued, however, that since sometimes the boys visit the girls' dormitories (in the comparatively few areas where they exist) the system contributes to the spread of venereal disease.

It is true that there is syphilis in NEFA, but much of it is now believed to be an endemic syphilis or yaws of non-venereal origin. Even this is not noticeably higher among the groups that have the girls' dormitory. The Singphos, the Avas Tais, and the Monpas of Kameng, all of whom suffer from this disease, do not have it. In most tribal cultures, indeed, the dormitory acts as a check against infection by segregating and disciplining the young girls of the community. Where all the unmarried girls sleep together in one place under some sort of communal discipline, it is very difficult for one of them to spend a night or even a few hours of the night away from the others; where girls are scattered in their own houses, or in little groups, about the village, it is obviously easier for an outsider who wishes to misbehave with one of them to do so. The dormitory in fact is the guardian of tribal endogamy.

Most of the tribes, whether they have the dormitory or not, allow a good deal of premarital sexual freedom to the young; at the same time they insist on a high standard of marital fidelity. I do not think that to close the girls' dormitories would promote conventional morality; it would merely drive the natural and simple freedom underground. To forbid the dormitory would create a sense of guilt, but would not change the standards of conduct—and that cannot be a good thing. And Mr Nehru once exclaimed, 'I react very sharply if anybody goes about preaching morals all the time.'

A special and difficult problem is the high price of wives. There is a marked inflation in the NEFA marriage-market, inevitable where bride-price is usually paid in kind. Twenty years ago, six mithuns did not represent a very large sum of money; today they do. The coming of a money-economy to NEFA may make it difficult for the sons of poorer families to obtain suitable wives, with a consequent lowering of moral standards, and a postponement of the time of marriage with a consequent decrease in population.

Girls also sometimes find it difficult to obtain suitable husbands. This is specially so among the Gallongs of Siang, where a peculiar

system of betrothal and marriage often results in mature girls being married to baby boys. This is favourable neither to morality nor happiness, and I think that possibly we might, very carefully, try to induce the Gailongs to modify this custom, which in fact some of their own leaders are already doing. We might also, without in any way forcing the issue, try to lower the bride-price where possible.

### *The Disposal of the Dead*

Another problem concerns the method of disposing of the dead by exposure—a practice which some younger officers in their enthusiasm have tried to stop. Indeed, some villages are under the impression, strongly, that it has been forbidden by the Administration.

The custom of exposing the dead is widespread. Certain Khattriya clans practiced it in ancient times; the Parsis maintain it to this day. It has been recorded from Melanesia and Madagascar. It exists only in a comparatively small area of north-east India. Dr Hutton has drawn a distinction between the Western Nagas (the Angamis, Somas, Rengmas, Lhotas and Tangkhuls), all of whom bury their dead, and the central Nagas, such as the Aos, the Konyak tribes and the Khiamungams, who expose them. Rich Aos, for example, until fairly recently, kept a corpse in the outer room of a house and lit a fire beneath it until it was smoke-dried. At the next Harvest Festival it was laid on a platform erected beside a path outside the village. If this was not done, the relations were told that they had not given the dead man his due of being attended. But gradually under the influence of education the custom of keeping the bodies in the houses passed, and now even the practice of exposing bodies outside has largely been abandoned by the Aos, who have taken to burying the dead like the Western Nagas.

It is probable that just as the Aos have changed, the Konyaks, Phoms and Khiamungams will change in time, and they will ultimately either cremate or bury their dead. But it is surely better that they should do this of their own accord; already some educated Konyaks, for example, are trying to influence their people in this direction. For to interfere with death customs is always unwise. Tribal people are extraordinarily sensitive to



everything connected with this subject. They believe that the spirits of the dead have power over the living, that they can ruin the harvest and kill the child in the woods, and it is thus essential not to irritate them by failing to perform the prescribed rituals.



A Kongsik tomb. The corpse is placed in a coffin curved with a hornbill's beak at one end, and exposed on a platform.

Among some tribes there is a custom of burying the dead beside the house or even (as among some of the Tanguts) beneath it; this is partly to protect the corpse from being desecrated by wild animals, partly to keep the ghost in the warmth and shelter of his former home. Some justice officers have rebuked the people for this practice. This is most unwise.

In western Kaiming, and indeed in places all along the northern frontier the people follow the Tibetan practice of cutting up a dead body and throwing it into a river. This custom, however repugnant to some, should never be criticised.

The danger of any interference in funerary customs is illustrated by the tragic example of the Nima Massacre.

On the 1st of February 1875, two British officers attached to the Topographical Survey, Captain Badgley and Lieutenant Hol-

guide, arrived with their escort at Nimi. The tragic incident that then befell and the atrocious retaliation that they exacted are fully described in the General Reports of the Topographical Survey of India for 1874-75, published in Calcutta in 1876. The Wanchos of Nimi attacked and slaughtered Holcombe and most of his troops in what appeared to the survivors an inexplicable act of treachery. No reason for the massacre is given in any of the official reports and it seems to have been assumed that it was a natural reaction of tribal savagery to the march of civilisation. The punitive expeditions that quickly followed destroyed several villages, including one that was completely innocent.

I myself visited Nimi in 1956, and was naturally interested to discover whether the people had any recollection of the events of eighty years ago, and it was soon evident that not only had they lively traditions of them, but they had suffered emotional and psychological wounds that were still unhealed. The account given by the Chief and other elders agreed more or less with the official reports so far as the general course of events was concerned, but they added the reason for the massacre about which our records have hitherto been silent.

According to Nimi tradition, the British officers and their escort camped at a little distance from the village. Only a week before, the Chief had died and the usual elaborate tomb had been built with a carved wooden effigy before it. Shortly after their arrival some of the troops, who were described as Nepalese, went into the village and saw the Chief's tomb. They laughed at it, one of them struck the effigy with his cane, and they abused the people for disposing of their dead in the way they did. There were three men from Bordonia accompanying the military party who went to have acted as interpreters. In the evening, the Nimi people, full of rage at the insult to their dead Chief and to their customs, and further inflamed (it was said) by the men from Bordonia, decided to take revenge and next morning they surrounded the camp and killed Holcombe with some eighty of his men.

*No New Taboo.*

There is a final and most important point. Not only are we not to interfere in tribal social life and custom unless there is something which offends against law and order or the universal

conscience of mankind, or unless it is clearly and unpoetically impoverishing the people, but we are equally not to introduce harmful customs and ideas from our own society.



Wanda, grace-efier

One of these, to which I have already referred, is the drinking of spirits as against rice-beer; another is gambling with cards. In Loló I found many Ides playing a curious mixture of bridge and whist, which they had been taught by Agency postmen. I once



trained a group of boys engaged in this profitable exercise. They played steadily for five-and-a-half hours during the morning and for three hours again at night. I remember too how some time ago I saw As youths, splendid healthy active boys, spending the best part of a morning round the carrom board. The introduction of 'civilised' diversions is not always for the benefit of the tribal people.

We have also to be cautious that we do not impart into NEFA our own system of taboos. I have spoken elsewhere of the extreme sensitivity of the people to any interference in their habits of food and drink. We must never give the impression that we look down on anyone for eating beef—or for that matter snakes and monkeys. If the matter ever comes up we may well mention that the most civilised people in the world, the French, eat snails and frogs. Great offence was once caused at one of our training-centres when the officer in charge abused the Mishmi and Ahi boys there as 'pungly', 'beef-eaters' and 'monkey-eaters'.

Most important of all is the danger of introducing a caste system among the NEFA people. Some of the tribal groups have a sort of class system: for example, the Warlus have three sharply defined classes, between which inter-marriage is at least theoretically forbidden; the Sherdukpens and Bagmas have a two-class system; the Aka have three divisions—the aristocracy, the middle-classes and the slaves; the freed slaves of Siang are forming a class above the slaves but below and separate from the rest of the population.

But there has never been anything like real caste or untouchability in NEFA, and it is a point sometimes made by missionary and NNC propaganda that we may bring this and other iniquitable ideas into the hills.

And if sweepers are introduced into NEFA, who can deny that they may be right? Untouchability has been outlawed and not one of the senior officers would touch it even in thought. But there are a sufficient number of the subordinate staff as well as contractors, shop-keepers, cool-labourers and others who undoubtedly will look, and are likely to look for many years to come, on the sweepers as a lower type of human being, and they may infect the tribal people with the same opinion. In central India, a strong feeling of repulsion towards the sweeper, the leather-

worker and the blacksmith has developed among the tribes as a result of contact with 'civilisation' during the last few decades.

Even to bring in sweepers from outside, therefore, is likely to have a bad effect; to employ tribesmen as sweepers and to lay the foundations of a tribal sweeper caste or submergerd sub-tribe would be a real crime against them. Some Kabui Nagas have taken up the work of sweepers in Imphal town and this is greatly resented by other Nagas. They are already a class apart and are banned from marriage and intermingling with their fellows. In NEFA too a few tribal sweepers have in the past been employed and have been promptly excommunicated by their fellows.

The Administration has, therefore, ordered that on no account should any tribesman be given the work of a sweeper. In the hospitals 'sweepers' as such have been eliminated, and instead there are 'medical attendants', all of whom help in cleaning buildings and compounds. When necessary, they and even the doctors themselves empty a bed-pan and this is an excellent example; indeed a hospital is an ideal place to propagate the view that there is nothing derogatory in meeting an elementary human need.

The case of the Assam Rifles is rather different. Some of the jawans are engaged on conservancy work, but they do not usually clean the lavatories, for the Assam Rifles outposts are normally provided with deep-pit latrines.

And this indeed is the real solution of this problem.

I myself lived for twenty years in a tribal village without ever employing a sweeper. We used the pit method and found it quite satisfactory; properly used, with plenty of earth, it does not attract flies and gives off no evil smell. Even now in many parts of the civilised world there are no water-closets and no sweepers; in European villages you will often find the earth-closet.

It will be necessary, however, as the townships grow into towns, to have a few conservancy workers to keep them clean. Such workers should never be asked to clean latrines; they should be quite distinct from 'lavatory-sweepers'; and they should suffer no social disability. We should not employ anyone in NEFA who, on the one hand, would refuse to accept food from the hands of any human being, or on the other hand, from whose hands members of the staff would refuse to eat. Some such rule would act as an automatic check on the introduction of caste prejudices.

*A Liberating Force*

We may summarise the ideas of this Chapter in the words of Mr Nehru,

'The problem of the tribal areas is to make the people feel that they have perfect freedom to live their own lives and to develop according to their wishes and genius. India to them should signify not only a protecting force but a liberating one. Any conception that India is ruling them and that they are the ruled, or that customs and habits with which they are unfamiliar are going to be imposed upon them, will alienate them and make our frontier problems more difficult.

'We must inspire them with confidence and make them feel at one with India, and realise that they are part of India and have an honoured place in it. This can only be done by allowing them to retain their own cultural traits and habits and leaving them to develop along their own lines without any compulsion from outside.'



## Chapter Eight

### CULTURAL AIMS IN NEFA

*A nation needs joy as much as food and knowledge.*

—C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

#### *A Tribal Renaissance*

Mr Jawaharlal Nehru has frequently stressed the importance of encouraging the art of the hill people of India. 'I am anxious,' he has said, 'that they should advance, but I am even more anxious that they should not lose their artistry and joy in life and the culture that distinguishes them in many ways.' And he has pointed out that all over the world the impact of modern, westernized, civilization has destroyed the creative impulse in simple, pre-literate populations and has given little in its place.

This, of course, is true, yet I believe that in the context of modern India this destructive influence can be checked. I will go further; I believe that by encouraging the arts of the tribal people, creating in them a pride in their own products, keeping before them their own finest patterns and designs, and by providing them with raw materials, it will be possible to inspire a renaissance of creative activity throughout the hill areas of India, especially in Assam where there is so much on which to build. There is thus no question of keeping the people 'as they are'. We are not aiming at a mere preservation of culture, the establishment of a static society under museum conditions. We want more, much more, beauty, colour, rhythm, laughter, the joys and graces of living to enrich a people who in the past have had to face unimaginable hardship and isolation.

The art of tribal people is often greatly affected by the artistic tendency of the surrounding populations. This may be seen very clearly in Manipur where the people of the plains are creative, lovers of the dance, with a strong attraction for colour and an instinct for design. As a result the impact of the Manipuris on such tribes as the Khasis has been fortunate, for they have learnt

improvements in technique and a refinement of their original patterns of weaving, and in their dances they have adapted enriching variations from the dances of the plains.

The people of Assam are a beauty-loving and artistic people. No one can withhold his admiration from the best traditional products of Assamese art, the splendour of its weaving, the grandeur of its temples and the gaiety and variety of its dances. We should expect, therefore, that the tribes living in close proximity to so artistic a people would benefit greatly from the contact.

Unfortunately during the later years of the British regime a wave of ugliness passed over the whole of India. In spite of the protests of Rabindranath Tagore and the active opposition of Mahatma Gandhi, vast quantities of cheap foreign goods poured into the country. The western world, says Herbert Read, 'has evolved a civilization of vast and all-pervasive vulgarity, a civilization without a decent face.' Its business-dominated economy soon gave India 'an architecture of poverty and ugliness in the manufacture of everyday things.' It spared no aspect of Indian life. The harmonious corrupted Indian music; western idioms deeply disturbed Indian painting and sculpture; mass-produced textiles nearly killed the Indian hand-loom industry, and even when this was revived left it with a heritage of debased designs or purely imitatorian aims. The Indian home became a vulgarized, second-rate copy of lodgings in Baltham or Tooting Bec. The old beauty was driven underground and the whole face of the countryside was changed and changed for the worse.

It was not until the coming of Independence that things began to change. Though they are still changing all too slowly, there has been an astonishing renaissance throughout the country of the traditional art of the common people. We now have lovely textiles from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal, Orissa and Bengal. In Assam, efforts have been made to revive the traditional patterns and colours of the old weaving. The art of wood-carving has come again into its own and many beautiful toys and other objects are being made, often by very ordinary folk, all over India. Work in silver and gold, in cane and bamboo, in clay and in a score of other mediums has been revived. The former beauty had not been killed, it had only been driven underground and one of the most hopeful features of the New India is the



way in which people everywhere are turning to the simple and attractive products of the village craftsman, who is thus being encouraged to increase and improve his output.

I have stressed this because it has an important bearing on the art of NEFA. As its people come more and more into contact with the outside world, they are going to be influenced artistically and culturally in many different ways. If the impact on them of civilisation is vulgar, shoddy and ugly then that contact will be merely destructive. For it is only natural that the simple peasants from the hills will imitate the products of what they conceive to be a higher civilisation. You may see this when any tribesman goes into a shop. His taste, which is so true when dealing with its own products, seems to fail entirely when he comes face to face with manufactured goods and he will often buy the worst coloured and the worst patterned and the least durable object that he sees.

We need to-day in India a William Morris or a Ruskin to lead us in a great crusade against the ugly, the shoddy and the vulgar. In this country, and especially in Assam where artistic values have been held in honour for centuries, this should not really be necessary. But unhappily the prestige of what is foreign has dominated the land far too long, and there have been too few people to guide the public taste.

The tribal people in other parts of India have retained few of the graphic and plastic arts and hardly any of their weave. But in north-east India they have never lost their creativeness and, whether it be in Manipur and Tripura, in the Naga country or the Mizo Hills, or in nearly all parts of NEFA, there is a new desire to make beautiful and useful things. The folk-dance festivals at Delhi and elsewhere have encouraged tribal people everywhere to dance more and to dance better, and All India Radio has recorded and encouraged their songs.

The chief art of NEFA is weaving and it is on the hand-loom that the greatest progress has been achieved. In the culturally impoverished villages of the Bangus, Tagins and Hill Miris of eastern Khamti and northern Subansiri, this art, which had either been unknown or had weakened to the point of extinction, is now coming again into its own. The Noctes and Tangsas of Tirap who, as a result of living so near the plains, had largely taken to



quilt-cloth for everyday use, are returning enthusiastically to their looms. Aik and Mishin women are expert weavers, but at one time were getting little to do, for their menfolk were abandoning their attractive coats and they themselves were buying strips of cheap bazaar cloth for skirts and blouses. Now they are busy again, for both men and women have realized that there is nothing to be obtained of in their own dress and that they will save money making it themselves. Among the Gallaings, for instance, a beautiful white skirt with a black geometric pattern had almost disappeared, but it has been revived and now every girl of fashion wears it.

There is one great danger in the modern revival of arts and crafts, that they will become imitative; conventional, mere second-rate copies of bazaar articles and that, with the very natural desire to produce more, the quality will decline. The Prime Minister's warnings about 'imposition' are of special importance here.

Some of the people of NEPA derive their arts from divine inspiration and the designs of their textiles grow, as it were, from the soil. The Bots of Niang attribute the invention of weaving to God himself, who imparted it in dreams to the wife of a great ancestor. Some of the Tungus believe that at first their men wore only bamboo girdles and their women bamboo leaves, until God gave them cotton-seed and taught them to spin and weave. The Ashings and Singphos attribute the invention of weaving to the spider and its web. The Kaman Mishnols of the Lohit and Klamang Valleys have many songs describing how the first weaver, who was taught the art by the gods, learnt their designs by watching the waves and ripples on the surface of streams, by looking up at the patterns woven by the branches of trees and the leaves of the bamboo, or by observing the design on the wings of butterflies, the markings of snakes and the scales of fish. In a Sherdukpen story a girl falls in love with a snake, who is a handsome youth in disguise. In his snake-form he coils himself in her lap as she weaves; she copies the markings on her lover's body and is soon making the most beautiful cloth that was ever seen.

Similarly, for the Milyangs and Ashings the traditional inventor of implements is a semi-divine hero, who was the first ironsmith.

and maker of ornaments; he persuaded the woodpecker to cut holes in the first bowls he made. The Singphos describe how the first craftsman learnt how to make a wicker basket by watching an elephant's feet crushing everything beneath them and a pair of tongs when a crab caught him with its claws. The arts are part of the mythology and draw their vitality from very ancient roots. Many of the traditional designs are symbolical in meaning and, though today only a few of the older women understand them, the whole architecture, symbolism and detail of the designs are deeply rooted in the tribal consciousness.

The same may be said of the music, the dances, the wood-carving, the ornaments. They are part of the heritage; they spring up in an ever-renew awakening, and this why the people have a fresh, original and very precious gift to bring to India.

But we must remember that this gift will only be precious so long as it is original. Once tribal art becomes imitative it will quickly lose its value. I am not one of those who would keep tribal art 'as it is' and would discourage change and development. Our approach to everything in life must be creative and dynamic. But equally I am not one of those who believe in trying to 'improve' the art of a people. That seems to me presumptuous. In 15th century England various poets attempted to improve Shakespeare and Milton. A 'respectable' version of *The Tempest* was produced with additional characters and *Paradise Lost* was rewritten in heroic couplets. Today we laugh at those who tried to do good to Shakespeare and Milton, and it may be that those who try to tidy up and refine the music, the dance or the designs of the tribal people may also one day be looked on as ridiculous. Mr. Nehru has deprecated attempts to modernize the folk-dance; if this is done, it will lose its charm and splendour. 'Bharat Mata in her various forms must continue to live and prosper.'

Unhappily, all over village India there is a tendency in official instructions for the people's art to become stereotyped and conventional. Mahatma Gandhi once said that the 'maiden of lovely Assam weaves poems on their looms.' Today many of them are being taught to weave prose. Town-bred instructors going into the tribal areas find it hard to follow the policy: 'Improve the technique, but do not change the colour and design.' It is all too common, in spite of our insistence that they should not im-



their own ideas upon the people, for these to try to 'improve' things in an artificial manner, rather than to allow change and progress to come naturally as, indeed, it has come in the past. This is probably due to a deep-rooted sense of superiority, which is one of the hardest things to remove from the ordinary mind. Now is it necessary, for tribal designs have, throughout the past century, been constantly on the move and the old records show that the Mishmis, for example, have greatly elaborated the patterns of their textiles in the last hundred years. The Administration has impressed on all those interested in developing the art of weaving that, while, of course, there should never be any restriction on the adventurous instinct of a weaver who desires to explore new creative ideas, there should be no self-conscious or artificial attempts at 'modernization' and no slavish imitation of Western goods or even the classical designs from other parts of India.

It is a different matter in places where there has been no tradition of weaving and here some interesting experiments have been made. For example, in Trip where the Tangas, Nôcies and Wancho have never had any kind of coat or blouse of their own, but have purchased black mackin cloth or even second-hand coats from the plains, it was necessary to devise coating and blouse materials which would be natural to them. The black Mishmi coat has been taken as the base, since the people of this area prefer black coats and blouses, and the designs have been adapted from the patterns on the Tanga or Wancho bags and from the bead-work at which the Wancho, in particular, show considerable powers of invention. The result has been that coats, in a new style which yet remain entirely tribal in character, have been devised and are rapidly becoming popular. Similarly, in northern Subanari, the Tagus, Hill Miso and many of the Daffas have only known a very elementary form of weaving. Traditionally many of the Daffas bartered their rice for cloth made by the Aya Tais and in places where that has been done in the past, Daffa weavers are being taught to use Aya Tai colors and designs. The Tagus seem to be allied to some of the Adi groups and Adi coats are therefore being taken as the base, and patterns adapted from the Adi and Mishmi tradition which is, on the whole, very similar to their's.

This kind of adaptation, and this method of suggesting, without



in any way forcing similar yet richer schemes of design and colour of the same general type has great possibilities.

The same policy will apply, of course, to painting and drawing or wood-carving. The old carving had vitality and strength, but it will lose it unless it continues to be free and rooted in the soil. Drawing and painting are almost unknown, except in Kameng, where the style is strictly traditional, but experiments have shown that there is great scope for the development of free drawing. At Bonjuli La the schoolboys were asked to make pictures of certain subjects such as Trade, Religion, Agriculture; the teachers were asked not to interfere; and the boys were told to do just what they liked. Some of the results were remarkably good; there was imagination, observation, vigour. Whenever the children draw things they know and like, they do well. But they are no good at the formal models—pigs and chairs and stiff conventional animals—that the ordinary teacher seems to think the proper objects for imitation.

### *The Guidance of Taste*

Good taste is the most neglected subject in schools and universities and, as I have pointed out above, the impact of inferior western models and standards has had a deplorable effect on the art of India. In NEFA, while it would be presumptuous for us to lay down rigid canons of taste, it is necessary to guide the people, who are so often bewildered by the astutling samples of civilisation which are presented to them, along the right path.

One way of doing this is through Museums and pictures. Every Division headquarters has a Cultural Centre, consisting of a Museum, a Library and an Emporium for the sale of local products. It was felt that it was more important to establish Museums in the hills than to have one in Shillong, where it would be interesting, certainly, to visitors and of academic value to the research staff, but would not be of practical advantage to the revival of NEFA culture. This policy has been followed in parts of Africa, where the display of the finest creations of the people's genius in places readily accessible to themselves has greatly encouraged their art. In Bonjuli La the buildings for the Cultural Centre are to be in the local style of a two-storied Dzong with a Kakaling gate in front, and walls and roofs painted by Monpa artists. Already these

Museum have stimulated the people's pride and productivity as they have seen their own best things treated with respect and admired by visitors.

Another way of creating self-respect has been through pictures. Hundreds of enlarged photographs of NEFA scenes and people have been distributed for display in offices, schools and hospitals in the Interior. An attractive Calendar illustrating the arts and crafts of NEFA was published in 1950, and another illustrating the dances of NEFA will appear for 1951. These Calendars are not only, or even primarily, for official use; their main purpose is to give the common man pictures for his home.

For the people of NEFA like pictures. In their little shops they display brightly-coloured prints of gods and goddesses or landscapes; in their houses you may find pages torn from illustrated magazines left behind by touring officers. In a remote village on the Pathek, I once saw a poor photograph of Sardin Pannikar adorning a Warabu girl's!

A minor, but very interesting, way of creating respect for the tribal people among the general public and of reviving their own pride in themselves has been through postage stamps. The Belgian Congo, for example, has always shown local scenes and people on its stamps, and a few years ago issued a superb set illustrating the achievements of African wood-carving. The French, in Africa, Oceania and elsewhere, have shown similar imagination. There are stamps from Togo with pictures of women husking grain, men hunting deer and women spinning, as well as examples of carved masks and images. The Cameroons, the Ivory Coast, Dahomey and Equatorial Africa have issued attractive sets illustrating men and women in their own attire, dancers, hunters, weavers and scenes of village life.

Even the Commonwealth has, in recent years, abandoned its former austere conservatism. The Solomon Islands have stamps illustrating the local arts, buildings and customs. Sarawak has a singularly fine set showing on different denominations an Iban woman, a Dayak dancer, a Kayan boy and girl, Kenyah boys, a Kelatar blacksmith. North Borneo contributes pictures of chiefs in all their finery, a Dyak, and a man with a blow-pipe. Sumatra has a pretty design of a dancing-party. Perhaps the best of all is a Papua set, which was designed with the assistance of an official

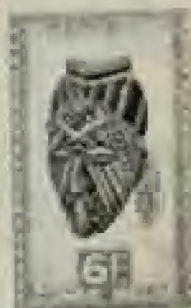
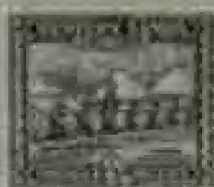
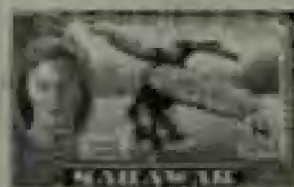
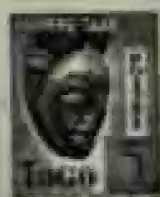


# ग्राम आसाम गालगयो कि आजाब



गन्दगी से बीमारी और सफाई से नन्दर





"Tribal" stamps from various countries

anthropologist. Here the stamp borders are adapted from Papuan wood-carving designs, and the pictures are of grandly dressed Papuan men and women, masked dancers, fishermen, hand-workers and potters. Many other countries have, to a greater or less degree, adopted the same plan, and the result is aesthetically pleasing and psychologically sound.

So far India has had only one 'tribal stamp', the three-ancee given in the set illustrating the Five Year Plan, which was issued on Republic Day 1955. This is based on a photograph of a Konyak woman weaving which I took in 1947—most of the Konyaks were included until recently in the NEFA area. India is issuing stamps on a wide variety of themes, and a set on her tribal people would be well worth producing.

For whom the people have pictures of themselves, in their own best style, they treasure them and are acquired with a sense of pride in their own things.

The control of shops is essential if tribal taste is not to be led very far astray. In the past many undesirable things, even brassieres, films and lipstick, were imported by the Marwaris and sold to the tribal girls; the most discordant fabrics, vulgar ornaments, shoddy blankets were introduced. But the Administration has now issued a directive which aims at eliminating shops owned by outsiders and controlling, so far as is possible, the type of goods brought into NEFA.

Some criticism has been made that this policy attempts to keep the people 'backward' by restricting their access to the products of civilisation. We may reply that on the contrary we are making available to them a large range of useful articles and are only discouraging those things which will waste their money and spoil their taste. The argument that the new policy means that money will remain in NEFA, and particularly, for example, in the case of cloth, that it goes into the hands of the women of the tribe instead of into the pockets of a merchant in Calcutta or elsewhere, generally makes a strong appeal. It could also be pointed out that everybody in India lives under some sort of restriction: we cannot buy many 'modern' goods from America. The story of Gandhiji's campaign against foreign goods and mill-cloth might also be told.

But this is no merely negative policy. The fundamental aim of the Administration is to ensure that the tribal people get their



money's worth. Special emporia are being opened in all Divisional headquarters for the sale of local home-made goods: soon these will be stocked with attractive trinkets, wood-carvings, ivory work, basketry. Co-operatives, as we have already seen, will bring good and useful articles to the villages, inexpensively and in a way that the people themselves will share the profits.

Some of the NEPA people are poor, but others are comparatively well-to-do, certainly better off than their tribal brethren and even ordinary peasants elsewhere. Some of them, in fact, are now earning a fair amount of money. They can afford to buy good things. They need not be condemned only to the ugly, the shoddy and the cheap. So the Administration is trying to make available to them things in good taste, things that are beautiful as well as useful.

A special effort is being made to provide these to the tribesmen living along the remote northern frontier. The Buddhist Monpas, Meros and Khambus of the border mountains make long journeys to Kalimpong or into Tibet to buy the warm cloth, the brocades, the decorated hats and shoes, the ribbons that they like and need. They get images, cloth for prayer-flags, little prayer-wheels, strings of beads for religious use; they buy pretty bowls of painted china, silver and wood. For their religion and art, they have previously turned to Tibet; today they are turning their eyes to India, the original home of Buddhism. And to help in this, the Administration is providing many articles of daily use or religious significance at their very doors. Officers go to Kalimpong to buy them on their behalf, take them on long journeys to distant outposts and sell them, at the cheapest possible rate, in the Co-operatives or official stores. This not only saves the tribesmen hundreds of man-hours which are wasted on exhausting and profitless journeys, but has already helped them to feel at home in India.

All over NEPA, this policy—which might well be followed in other tribal areas also—aims at the enrichment of the people by providing them with good and useful things; at helping them to save their money; at protecting them from exploitation; at guiding their taste; and at encouraging their own industries and trade.

Art is no mere luxury. Nothing, said the Irish poet W. B. Yeats, is more pleasing to God than 'the glad invention of beauti-



ful and exalted things.' Art is the main-spring of a full and happy life, for he who creates fulfils the purpose for which he was created.

### *The Revival of Recreation*

An important way of countering the sense of inferiority and avoiding dehumanization is to revive tribal recreations—dance, song, games. In central India, the dance was at one time dying out completely, for the Gonds and other tribes there got the idea that to dance was not quite respectable and led to their being scorned by their more 'advanced' neighbours. Certain types of missionary also have forbidden their converts to dance or to sing the old songs, permitting them only to sing hymns—or American ragtime. The all-India revival of folk-dancing has already done something to check this tendency, and so has the personal influence of Mr Nehru.

'It is a very great pity,' he has said, 'that we in the cities have drifted so far away from the aesthetic side of life. We still have a good many folk-songs and dances when we go to the villages, because modern civilization has more or less left them untouched. The progress of modern civilization in India involves both good things and bad. One of the things we have lost is the spirit of song and dance and the capacity for enjoyment and this is what the tribal people so abundantly have. We seem to pay too much attention to the cinema! It is undoubtedly an excellent medium for many good things, but unfortunately it has not proved to be particularly inspiring. We must imbibed something of the spirit of the tribal folk instead of damping it with our long faces.'

'Tribal culture,' says Mr Nehru again, 'leads to a way of life which particularly makes the people rejoice in song and dance. Our mentors who go to their towns at their ways and tell them to dance free, then in the name of reform. The result is that they lose somewhat that joy in life which they possess in abundant measure and gain little else in its place. They become joyless and dehumanized, dull and insipid. Surely that is a wrong approach.'

Broadly speaking, there are two types of dance practiced by most tribal peoples: one is ceremonial, and it is normally taboo to perform it except on the occasions—of festival, wedding, funeral

—established by tradition. The other is recreational, and may be danced at any time; boys and girls dance, not to please the gods, but to please themselves. In NEPA many of the dances are of the first type, though the people nowadays are willing to 'lay them on' for special official occasions such as Republic Day or the visit of a VIP.



Sherdukpen masked dancer.

Along the northern frontier, the Monpas and Sherdukpens, the Membas and Khandas have a large repertory of ceremonial pantomimes, which the mountaineers perform in gorgeous dresses and finely carved and painted masks, during the chief festivals of the Buddhist year. They are accompanied by bands of drummers, trumpeters and Lamas clashing great cymbals, and are done in

front of the local Gumpa or temple. They generally tell a story or point a moral, but there are claims to provide refreshing humorous interludes. But they are too elaborate, too expensive to be performed often, and for recreation boys and girls have simpler dances for everyday use.

The Alas, Bogum and Mijis have charming dances, performed mostly by girls. The Daffas or Bangnis are more vigorous than artistic, and so are the Apa Tania, though some of their performances, which may be classified as either games or dances, such as the Snake Game or the Dance of the Short-Tailed Bird, are expertly done and are a delight to watch. Among the Mishmis the dance is rather severely restricted to ceremonial occasions, but when the priests do dance in all their finery they can put on an impressive display. But they are definitely dances for the gods and not for men. The Tangmas at one time had almost given up dancing, but the art is now being revived. The Noctes and Wanchoos of Turap formerly had a splendid war dance, which has naturally declined with the coming of peace, but it may be possible to transform it so that it will symbolize the war against disease and poverty.

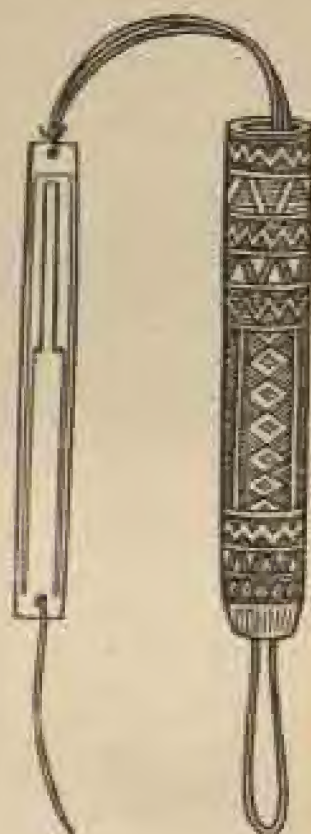
But the great dancers of NEFA are the Acheis of Siang and north-western Lohit. The *ponung*, as it is called, is justly famous and has a very large variety of steps and movements; it has its ceremonial aspect, for at certain festivals the leader chants the traditional epics of the tribe, but it is also enthusiastically performed on all possible occasions simply for recreation.

But there are parts of NEFA, in northern Subansiri, for example, where the standard of dancing is poor, and many areas where there is no spontaneous recreational dancing at all, with the result that the life of the villages lacks excitement and delight.

This is accentuated by a curious lack of musical instruments, the most remarkable deficiency being a very general absence of the drum. There are, it is true, Mishmi and Monpa drums and the Wanchoos and Noctes have great log-drums or xylophones in their Monngs, though the latter are only beaten on ceremonial occasions and in the past were mainly associated with head-hunting. The Jew's-harp is found and there is a variety of fiddles, but the flute is less common than one would expect. In the main, dances and songs are unaccompanied.



The songs of NEPA are often inspired with poetic imagination and many of the tunes are beautiful. But they are not very easy to hear. People are not accustomed to sing to order and, in some places, there are taboos on women singing in the presence of their



Jew's harp with container from  
the Tswana area of  
northern Bantu

townfolk, or children in front of their parents. To hear NEPA singing at its best you have to travel far and patiently. But when you do hear it the reward is great. I shall never forget listening at night to girls in a lonely village on the Pankai singing exquisitely

as they pounded grain in a great mortar, or to Khami Mishni girls high up in the Khamlang Valley engaged in the same task. I have heard beautiful Ashing singing in villages on the right bank of the upper Siang as the girls went to fetch water amid the stupendous scenery of the snow-clad mountains. Aka boys and girls travelling through the forests break out into spontaneous bursts of song that stir the heart. Songs sung during the dances have a vigorous rhythm and may be very pretty.

In other places, however, the singing tends to be rather unimpaired and to have little variety, while everywhere there is not enough of it.

There is thus a great deal of room for developing these natural and innocent arts, though it has, of course, to be done with caution. We should be careful about any attempt to change a dance which is strictly ceremonial into a form of recreation (though this might be done) and should not introduce ritual dances into the educational curriculum, for this might well disturb the orthodox and would probably not succeed.

The task of revival will not be easy, for the drabdest cultural areas are mainly continuous with the most difficult and drab terrain. But to bring joy and colour to these places is almost as important as providing them with food.

What is being done about this?

Touring officers of senior standing are encouraging dances while on tour, and many show a keen and intelligent interest in them; there are dances on all important official occasions. In one Division at least local tribal experts have been invited to the schools, once or twice a week, to teach the children singing and recreational dances; this has the advantage, not only of associating the local tribesmen more closely with the schools, but also of freeing the boys and girls from the temptation, so often present, of regarding their own recreations as beneath them once they get a little education.

The fact that so many dances have a ceremonial purpose and may not be performed on ordinary occasions makes, as I have said, the introduction of dancing into the school curriculum sometimes difficult, but wherever the dance is recreational in motive it is being made part of the school routine. Competitions between schools for the best dancing, tribal dress and ornament, and sing-

ing have been held. Special occasions of jubilation and importance are celebrated by a dance at the school in which not only the children, but the local villagers participate.

An important winter task is to make dancing-grounds, and officers on tour are encouraging the boys and girls to clear and



Wamhu was dance

level suitable places in the villages. This has been done with remarkable success in Anag.

The essential thing at the moment is not to improve the dance where it is already flourishing, as, for example, among the Adis, but to revive or introduce it where it does not exist or only exists in a dying or decadent condition.

Where dances are introduced, they should be, as far as possible, of the general cultural tradition to which they belong. Thus the Idu Mishnis might be inspired by the Padam, but not by the Sherdokpo or Lushala. The best dances of Tuennang or even



the Naga Hills might be introduced into Tirap and vice-versa. There is a suggestion to appoint some of the most expert tribal dancers to go as instructors to areas where the art is unknown.

Dancing-parties might occasionally be taken on visits to culturally impoverished areas. A party of girls from Along might do a lot of good if they danced at Daporijo; a Sherdupen party of masked dancers visiting Tirap, where the art of wood-carving still exists, might inspire a similar, but typically Wamho or Nocte kind of pantomime there.

I myself have found that the gramophone is generally more appreciated than the radio. The reception is better, it is more practical, and it is possible to replay a popular record. A.I.R. has plans to make gramophone records of NEFA music and whenever possible touring officers should take gramophones and such records with them. Here too it will be advisable to play records of the same general group. I have found Angami records popular in Tirap, where the musical tradition is somewhat similar, but not appreciated at all in Siang. On the other hand, Adi records went down very well indeed in Subansiri. But the radio and gramophone, for the time being, should be used with caution, for there is danger that they may swamp the natural songs of the tribes—Khasi and even more Jaintia music is now largely assimilated to the hymn or the cinema-hit—and may make them lazy, so that they will prefer to listen rather than sing themselves. Later, when NEFA song and music is established, and the people are proud of it, it will be a different matter.

The import of musical instruments, such as cornets and trumpets unknown to the local tradition, is undesirable and, following the example of All India Radio, the Administration has discouraged the use of the harmonium in schools and Variety Shows. On the other hand, it would be good to popularize the bamboo flute, so easy to make, so charming in effect. Every schoolboy should have one. And the Jew's-harp, in their beautifully decorated little cases, should not be confined to northern Siang, but should be much more widely used.

There is a great variety of games in NEFA and these have now been studied and a small book has been published with the aim of reviving them both in the villages and in the schools. There are games about birds and animals, ants and bees, foxes and

chickens, tigers and wild rats. There are hunting games and games imitating such domestic tasks as drawing water and husking grain. There are games of skill and endurance. Some of the games, such as the famous *Hohe*, which is known on the *Apu Tan*



The *Hohe* Swing

plains, all over northern Siam and in the Yang Sang Chu Valley, have a serious ceremonial purpose, it is intended to drive away the demon of dysentery. In spite of this, however, I have found that this exciting form of acrobatics is played freely

at all times simply for amusement. There are also many games resembling those played elsewhere in India and indeed in the world—wrestling games, high and low jumping, archery, skipping, still-walking and the Tug of War.

The revival of these games in schools is of special value as it helps to bring education closer to the life of the tribe and village and helps the children to preserve their pride in their own life. The games too can be played with local materials and do not involve the purchase of expensive apparatus.

Some of the NEFA people show a remarkable attitude for devising little plays, many of them extremely funny and some having a satirical purpose. One may show a tribal boy getting on a train for the first time, another a stupid school-master trying to get boys to school in the wrong way, a third a lay compounder failing to give patients the right kind of medicine. Other games recall scenes of village life; there may be a quarrel over a boundary-line, somebody may steal fish from an old woman, there may be acrimonious bargains about a bride-price or the sale of a mithun.

These dramatic performances seem to be a very old tradition in NEFA. When Dalton visited the Mishmi hills just over a hundred years ago he was entertained by what he calls 'a very characteristic dramatical entertainment.' 'The first scene represented a peaceful villager with his children hoeing the ground, singing and conversing with them as if utterly unconscious of danger. A villainous-looking crop-head glides in like a snake serpent seen in the long grass, takes note of the group, and glides away again. Presently armed savages are seen in the distance. They come gradually and stealthily on, till within a convenient distance they stop and watch their prey like so many cats, then there is a rush in, the man is supposed to be killed, and the children carried screaming away.'

The same author describes plays performed by the Khaingals about 1855 to celebrate the birth and the death of the Lord Buddha. 'At these ceremonies boys dressed up as girls go through posture dances, for which, I believe, Burmese women are celebrated, and at the anniversary of the saint's death the postures are supposed to be expressive of frantic grief; but as a more distinct commemoration of the birth, a lively representation of an



accompaniment is acted. One of the boy-girls is put to bed and wailed on by the others. Presently something like infantile cries are heard, and from beneath the dress of the invalid a young puppy dog is produced squeaking and carried away and bathed, and treated as a new-born babe.<sup>7</sup> And in 1876 the Singphos are reported as arranging entertainments 'in which character dances formed a permanent feature.'

The development of a NEFA theatre through the composition of little plays has great promise, provided no one attempts to write them out and make them stereotyped.

In NEFA recreation is not a luxury; it is a duty. By making the people happy, it eliminates anxiety and discontent; by filling the time fruitfully, it raises morale. It is an important means, provided it is on the right lines, towards the development of tribal culture. As Kalir says:

*The hills and the sea and the earth dance;*

*The world of man dances in laughter and sport.*

### *The Importance of Research*

If we are to work for a revival of tribal culture, we must know what it is; if development is to be on scientific lines, it must be built on facts; if the approach to the people is to be correct, it cannot depend on sentiment—there must be a deep understanding of tribal psychology, beliefs and customs. The Administration, therefore, has placed the greatest emphasis on research in a number of different fields. Medical research, for example, is studying, through field surveys and at the Central Pathological Laboratory at Pangloss, the urgent problems of dermatitis, gonorrhea, tuberculosis, leprosy and depopulation. Agricultural research is exploring the possibility of improving the technique of ploughing, the introduction of new types of seed and certain cash-crops, and the practicability of improved horticulture and arboriculture at various altitudes. A Statistical Branch is bringing the realm of mathematics to all aspects of the Administration's work. For anthropological, philological and historical research a special Research Branch was started in 1955.

The work of this Branch centres round the concept of 'Philanthrology', a word which was used of the work of the great Cambridge scholar Haddon to describe that approach to anthropo-



The NEPA people are fond of 'variety shows'. Here is a pair of Bagun clowns



**Acculturation** A former head-hunter of Tirap decorates his basket with a plastic doll instead of the traditional carved wooden head.



logical research which, while retaining to the full the dispassionate attitude of science, is at the same time concerned to use that science for the benefit of human beings.

How this is to be done has long been a matter of controversy among scholars. Some consider that it is the anthropologist's main task to collect the facts and leave it to the administrator or politician to apply them to actual situations. Some feel that he has an important function in the realm of what has been called 'prediction'. He draws on the experience of history and his knowledge of what has happened under similar conditions elsewhere to predict what may be the result of following certain courses of action. R. W. Firth has always held that his function is 'to indicate the implications of alternative policies and leave governments to choose between them.' L. P. Mair, in her valuable *Studies in Applied Anthropology*, agrees with this. 'The anthropologist should be content to put his knowledge at the disposal of the framers of policy, leaving to them the responsibility for decisions into which other considerations must enter. He can fairly claim that governments would be unwise to disregard all the facts he lays before them, and dismiss as "reactionary" all those aspects of indigenous custom and social structure which present obstacles to the attainment of the ends they have chosen.' She also stresses the anthropologist's importance as an interpreter. 'Much of us,' she says, 'have come to regard the people we have lived among as our friends, and have wished to give a sympathetic interpretation of them to readers who may include impatient emissaries of material, and indignant emissaries of moral uplift.'

The NEFA research workers are not concerned with policy as such. Their task is to study the people and their institutions so that if, for example, we want to encourage the tribal councils we will have a foundation of accurate information on which to build. They can also assist the Administration, as I will show later, in many practical ways and by penetrating deeply into the people's psychology and interests help the staff in general to avoid mistakes and take the right approach. This approach is, of course, the essential thing. The research men must adopt themselves, and infect others with, a certain attitude, which is the essentially scientific attitude to everything. That attitude is one of respect and humility. The anthropologist who approaches the tribal

people with the idea that they are savage or inferior, will not go very far. The people themselves will quickly resent his attitude and will just not tell him the things he wants to know. It is essential that he should approach them with a desire to learn and not to teach. As he does that he will automatically build up in them a feeling of pride in their own life and culture and will help to free them of that inferiority complex which, as I have shown, is one of the greatest dangers of all tribal people coming under the influence of civilization. But not only should the research man himself adopt this attitude, he must also infect everyone he meets with the same way of looking at things. The best officers (indeed the only officers who should be there at all) in the tribal areas are those who approach their people with humility, respect and affection. This must not be a pose adopted to gain particular political aims. It must come from somewhere very deep down in the heart. As Mr Nehru has said, 'For all of us, the first thing to do is to try to understand the hill people. That is no easy matter because we live in our shells and are seldom receptive to something to which we are unaccustomed. We have to come out of these shells, be receptive, develop understanding and then approach these people in a spirit of comradeship. It is that spirit that counts and not so much the various organized approaches that we might make.' When such an attitude is based on truth and knowledge it will be real and this is where anthropology comes in, by providing the knowledge which will help to make such an attitude sincere.

A belief in racial superiority is still a temptation to mankind. The attitude of India towards the tribes has changed greatly in the last ten years, but there are still those who, in their pride of race and position, regard them as an inferior race. This spirit cannot be changed by romantic sentiment, the right attitude must be founded in the intelligence; there must be a philosophy behind it.

A few years ago UNESCO issued a statement, prepared by a group of leading biologists and anthropologists, on the false concept of race which has so long dominated the world. Scientists, it declared, have reached general agreement in recognising that mankind is one; that all men belong to the same species, *Homo*



Sapient. It is further generally agreed among scientists that all men are probably derived from the same stock, and that the genes that differentiate them are few in comparison with the vast number common to all human beings, regardless of the populations to which they belong. "This means that the likenesses among-men are far greater than their differences."

The biological fact of race and the myth of 'race' should be distinguished. 'For all practical social purposes, "race" is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth.' A recently published book described race as man's most dangerous fallacy, a fallacy that has caused an enormous amount of human and social damage. "In recent years it has taken a heavy toll in human lives and caused untold suffering. It still prevents the normal development of millions of human beings and deprives civilization of the effective co-operation of productive minds."

Biological and sociological studies further lend support to the ethic of universal brotherhood. 'For man is born with drives towards co-operation, and unless these drives are satisfied, man and nation alike fall ill. Man is born a social being who can reach his fullest development only through interaction with his fellows. The denial at any point of this social bond between man and man brings with it disintegration. In this sense, every man is his brother's keeper. For every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the team, because he is involved in mankind.'

Across the tattered labels of human relations science writes in shining letters that all men are brothers.

In NEFA the Research Officers are doing what they can to establish these great principles and to help in many practical ways. The Philological Section would like nothing better than to devote its attention to the academic study of the many languages and dialects (some fifty in all) in this linguist's paradise. It would be a fascinating business and doubtless there would be many pages of learned journals filled with its conclusion. The NEFA philologists are not neglecting this aspect of their work; but they feel that at the moment there is something even more important and they are devoting themselves to the preparation of Grammars, Dictionaries and Phrase-books to help officers to learn the local languages; to supervising the translation of school text-books, so that education at least in the primary stage can be carried on in



the mother tongue, and to building up a written and printed tribal literature. A substantial collection of the myths and legends of NEPA, many of unusual interest, has been published. At present it is in English, but I hope that in time local versions will be prepared and will help to preserve many fascinating stories full of poetry which may otherwise be forgotten.

The cultural anthropologists are working in the same spirit. Thus they require into tribal religion, both to add to the world's knowledge of theology and so that their colleagues in all branches of the Administration can understand and so respect tribal beliefs. They study material culture so that the information thus obtained may help the development of cottage industries. They examine social organisation and jurisprudence to assist in the building up of co-operatives on the right lines and to help the development of tribal political institutions.

Another subject of considerable interest and importance is the economics of the tribal areas. Some of the people in NEPA are great traders and only recently I saw in the far north how they go from one river valley to another carrying loads of skins to exchange for beads, export cotton and receive salt in return, and go on long journeys to obtain wool, trading it for all sorts of things that they have made themselves. In areas where a money economy has only just been established, a study of the methods of barter and ideas of wealth is of great importance, for money is a distracting thing and the transition from one system to other has to be made with the greatest care.

Sociological research is also important in the field of education. In his book on *Chaga Childhood*, Dr J. Rauts stresses the importance of studying the traditional methods of educating the young so that schools can be built up on that basis and thus become a natural function of tribal society. We must study the impact of civilisation on tribal institutions through the schools, and indeed surveys should be made from time to time to assess the results and value of our education. Primitive education is a natural and continual function of a complex and complete society. In schools the foreign element is introduced in an artificial, transitory and intermittent manner. In the kinship group, the standards to be achieved are natural adaptations with a view to co-operating for common ends, a type of moral education. In the school the

criterion of success depends upon individual tests of memory and skill in an organization of formal instruction. We must now endeavour, once having accepted, as we must, that primitive education is a fact and not merely a theory, to adapt our methods to fit in with and improve upon the sound and healthy features of indigenous education.' To ensure this, much careful research will be required.

Interesting examples of how anthropology can be of value to an administration have been given by Clyde Kluckhohn. A poverty-stricken American Indian tribe used to make itself even poorer by destroying the house and property of anyone who died. An anthropologist persuaded the people to cease the practice by an extension of the 'humiliation' procedures already established in their religion. Government's objective was achieved, but 'within the framework of the tribal culture'. The Ashanti of the West Coast of Africa started rebelling against the British Government. It was an anthropologist who discovered the reason. British officials and tourists had been taking back as curios to England certain wooden stools which the people regarded as embodying their guardian spirit. Many other examples are given in an important book, *Human Problems and Technological Change*, edited by Edward Spicer.

Similar examples can be drawn from NEFA. The Mishmis believe that if anyone sits on the wooden slab which the head of a household uses as a pillow, the latter's expectation of life will be decreased. In some places, to ask an unmarried girl for tobacco is equivalent to an attempt at seduction. No one should ever touch the fence on which the clothes and ornaments of a dead man are hung after his funeral. It is a breach of etiquette to enter any room in a tribal house without warning. All NEFA houses are decorated with the heads of animals taken in the chase or sacrificed at festivals. These make convenient pegs on which to hang a hat or umbrella, but no one should ever do this, for it is believed that it will bring misfortune to the household.

Officers on tour have to be very careful about having bamboos cut for camp or even collecting fire-wood from the ground. Certain clumps of bamboo are reserved for ceremonial purposes; certain trees are sacred and even the fallen branches may not be used.



Villagers have sometimes been puzzled by the elaborate systems of fines in Adi villages. After the village council has met and the offender has agreed to pay compensation for whatever fault he has committed, he then has to give an additional animal for sacrifice. The reason for this is found in the belief that material objects have souls. The Adis call this soul the *aitk* and it is believed that if any article is stolen, the *aitk* leaves it in disgust and has to be persuaded to return. So if anybody steals a string of beads he must, in addition to the compensation for theft, give a pig or fowl, according to his means, to persuade the *aitk* to return into the necklace. If he robs a granary, a very rare offense, he has to pay for a sacrifice before it to persuade the offended 'soul' to take up its abode there again.

Sometimes when a house catches fire the neighbours refuse to help in putting it out and it is very easy to blame them for such anti-social conduct. But they are not being anti-social, they are influenced by the belief that if they interfere with the activities of the spirit or demon of fire they may attract him to set fire to their own homes. When Father Krick visited Mondo over a hundred years ago a house caught fire and he noted that instead of throwing water on the flames, men climbed on the roof and brandished their swords to frighten away the fire-spirit. When the fire was over the inhabitants of the burnt building were banished from the village, for it was believed that if they stayed in anyone's home they would bring disaster upon it.

Many of the NEFA houses have lavatories attached to the main building and at one time Gums Sevakt used to try to persuade the householders to build their lavatories some distance away in the interest of better sanitation. This, of course, was an excellent idea but, in practice, it was found that it led to complications, for during periods of taboo (which sometimes last for a week to ten days) there is a rule that no one may come into or go out of a house; and the people were faced with the dilemma either of breaking the taboo, which they regarded as a very dangerous thing to do, or of behaving in a thoroughly unsanitary manner. A compromise has now been reached whereby the lavatories are being moved a little distance from the main buildings, but are connected by corridors so that the people can use them without going outside.



We should be very cautious in urging tribal people to move from one place to another, for there is often a strong religious attachment to traditional village sites. Mr P. G. Shah, in his book on the Duddai of Gujarat, describes how a number of Warlis, living only twenty-two miles from the city of Bombay, had been shifted to a new colony of huts with kitchen gardens, verandas and compound walls. They lived there for nearly ten years. 'But suddenly there was an epidemic of sickness and the toll of death was heavy; the whole group suddenly returned back to their old abandoned huts, repainted these and lived in happiness and contentment in their dark, dingy but ancestral huts sanctified by the blessings of their local Bhagat. When I interviewed them after the change-over, they were happy and had no ill-will even for the loss of the possession of their modern huts in which they had lived for nearly ten years and for which they had worked and paid towards the cost. They preferred freedom from fear of the supernatural to the better and more sanitary housing conditions, even though they involved less time in reaching their place of work. Thus economic considerations play a restricted part among the primitive people, as their social behaviour is seldom governed by pure economic factors.'

How easy it is to make mistakes is illustrated in the following incidents. An Agricultural Inspector once arrived at a certain place one morning when the people were engaged on a special sacrifice and it was strictly taboo for anyone to enter the village. The headman and others came to the visitor and begged him to camp outside, as it was against their rules and would be sure to lead to an outbreak of disease if he came in. To the Inspector, however, this seemed absurd and he insisted on making his camp in the headman's house. A week later an epidemic broke out and no fewer than twenty people died. Though this was over six years ago, even today the villagers are convinced that these deaths were caused by official ignorance and scorn of local custom.

On another occasion a visiting party was due to visit a Nocte village and had expressed a wish to witness a headhunting dance. The local officials urged the Noctes to lay this on, but they protested that it was against their rules and even dangerous to dance inside a village area wherein the skulls of their enemies were kept. They did not mind, they said, going to the Divisional headquarters

or elsewhere to perform the dance, but they did object to doing it inside the village. The officials did not take this very seriously and pressed the people so hard that they finally agreed to dance in a place which was convenient for the visitors, even though it was ominous for themselves. After the departure of the visiting party, the piece of ground on which the dance had been performed was tabooed and nobody would cross it or even approach it. But about a month later a little boy went to play there. His parents called him back, but within an hour he had developed high fever and by evening was dead. I do not know how this is to be explained, but here again I am told, the villagers lay the guilt of this death at the door of the official staff.

Special care has to be exercised in taking photographs, especially by visitors who are new to the area and staying only a short time. All over tribal India, the people are apprehensive of the camera, sometimes believing that it is a magical instrument that can damage the liver or extract the soul, and no one should ever insist on photographing an unwilling subject. During a long tour among the Boris of northern Siam, one of the most handsome and picturesque of all the NEFA tribes, I put my camera away altogether for I found that the people were afraid of it, and I felt it would be wrong to cause them anxiety. Long ago, in the Sacra hills of Orissa I photographed a number of wall-paintings which had a religious character. Shortly afterwards an epidemic of dysentery broke out: it was attributed to my camera; and on my next visit I found that some of the people had washed all the paintings from their walls for fear I might photograph them again.

This is not true everywhere. In most of the Divisional headquarters the tribal folk have become accustomed to the camera, and sometimes even demand to be photographed. The situation varies from place to place, and the wise photographer will walk warily.

It is tragically easy to make mistakes in the remote mountain and forest where the tribal people live. It is essential that schemes of development should be on scientific lines, adapted to their real material and psychological needs. It is the proud and important task of the philanthropologist to try to provide the materials which help to make this possible.



## CONCLUSION

What I have written applies with special force to the North-East Frontier Agency, but it has its bearing on all the tribal areas of India, for many of the problems are the same everywhere, though their urgency varies from State to State. In one the people may be chiefly agitated about their land and forests or the commercial exploitation that brings them so much anxiety and loss. In another the central problem may be their emotional integration with their neighbours in the plains; a third may be disturbed by religious controversies; in a fourth the coming of large numbers of refugees may be gravely disturbing the entire tribal economy. Yet everywhere the great fundamental principles laid down by Mr Nelson and elaborated in this book, modified and adapted to the special circumstances of each area, will help towards a solution. Honestly applied, these principles may involve a lot of re-thinking, even the reversal of conventional policies; they are disturbing principles, tiresome if you like, unpopular, easy to twist and misunderstand, and vulnerable to the thoughtless criticisms of the ill-informed. Yet if those concerned will take the trouble to understand them, and sincerely try to put them into practice, I believe they can bring about a transformation of the tribal situation throughout the country.

When I once asked Mr R.P. Chaliha, the great-hearted Chief Minister of Assam, what magic he had used for the solution of the many human and political problems in the Aizamemant District of his State, he replied, 'A little understanding, a genuine respect, a lot of affection.' This is the real magic that works wonders in human hearts.

And it is with this magic that administrators and social workers everywhere must approach the tribal people and their problems. But they must translate their idealism into very practical realities. Under the programmes of the Five Year Plans they will be trying to bring greater prosperity, more food, better health, roads, clean water, education; all this we take for granted. But there is no point in growing rich if there is a thief lurking behind the house. They must guarantee the tribal folk their land, give them a



generous freedom of their forms, eliminate the middleman by Co-operatives, banish the money-lender, build up the tribal councils. And they must never forget the imperishables, never forget that man does not live by bread alone, but that the greatest of all treasures is a quiet mind and inner happiness. They must adapt themselves and all their enterprises to the local scene, they must revive craftsmanship in those who have lost their arts, stimulate the old joy and zest in living, restore self-respect and a pride in their own religion and culture among those who have been infected by a feeling of inferiority, and above all give them a sense of freedom through a vision of what they can contribute to the great country which they have come to love, and the hope that they will soon play their full part in administering themselves.

But now let us return for a moment to NEPA before I close my meditation. The first important point is that an Administration of this kind works as a whole; everything fits together, everyone has a share in it, and it all affects in one way or another the life of the tribal people.

One of the great achievements of the last three years has been the creation of the Single-Line Administration which stresses the inter-relationship of the entire work and the importance of every aspect of it. Even those members of the staff who do not deal directly with the tribal people have it in their power to influence them, for good or evil. Thus the officers dealing with supply and transport have a vital part to play in maintaining supplies for building institutions and keeping the staff supplied with the necessities of life. But equally they have the opportunity of ensuring that the goods imported into NEPA will not corrupt tribal taste or tempt the people to waste their money on unnecessary and unobtainable things, but will rather enrich their life with the best products (within, of course, a limited price-range) that India, traditionally an artistic and beauty-loving country, can supply.

The Assam Rifles can play a large part, not only in maintaining law and order, but in setting an example to the people of unswerving discipline, self-help and the dignity of manual labour. By their frugality and readiness to help in all emergencies, the param have always proved good ambassadors and their influence has been of great value in integrating the people with the rest of India. They are now being more closely associated with the

development programme, in the making of roads and bridges, and in the growing of food.

The work and influence of the office assistant, the accountant or the Sub-Treasury Officer is not confined to the keeping of accounts and dealing with files. The people of NEFA are remarkably sensitive to two things, the first is delay, the second is corruption. The prompt and courteous settlement of bills, whether for contracts, portage, casual labour on roads, air-strips or buildings; a readiness to spare time to listen to a grievance, the elimination of long waits outside an office—have their social and political effect. And conversely, delay, neglect, irritability and impatience create the worst possible impression on the tribal mind and foster the sense of inferiority and alienness.

Integrity, fidelity in the keeping of accounts, a constant watch to see that Government money is put to the best possible use for the benefit of the people, the determination that the bulk of the money will be spent for their good and not for the staff are of the utmost value in winning the sometimes suspicious and critical heart of the educated tribesman.

Even the motor-driver, the peon, the medical attendant in the hospital has his part to play in this great task. The tribal people look at the Administration as a whole, and however good a Political Officer may be himself, he will fail unless he can inspire his entire staff with his own ideals. One bad assistant, or corrupt chapman, or oppressive interpreter can undo much of the good done by the higher officers.

Success in the very delicate task of steering a middle way between leaving too much alone and interfering too officiously and imposing too heavily on the life of the people will depend on an appreciation of the fundamental ideas set out by the Prime Minister. As an aid to this, administrators of all the tribal areas throughout India might well adopt the following touchstones for any scheme for development, welfare, relief and expansion: the sentences within quotation marks are from Mr Nehru's own speeches and writings.

1. Will the scheme help the tribesmen 'to grow to according their own genius and tradition'?
2. Or will its result be merely 'to shape them according to



our own image or likeness and impose on them our particular way of living?

2. Will it tend to make of the tribesmen 'a second-rate copy of ourselves'?
3. Will it 'uproot the tribal people from their surroundings' and 'make them grow soft and thus lose some of their fine qualities'?
4. Is it open to the criticism that 'it is grossly presumptuous on our part to approach the tribesmen with an air of superiority or to tell them what to do or not to do'?
5. Will it involve too rapid a process of acculturation or, in other words, are we trying to go too fast?
6. Is there any danger that we are overwhelming the tribes by too many projects, each good in itself, but in the aggregate imposing too heavy a burden?
7. Will it impair or destroy in any way the self-reliance of the people?
8. Is it really, on a long-term basis, for the ultimate good of the tribesmen, or is it simply something that will make a good show in the press or an official report?
10. Will it, in the case of NEFA, help to integrate the tribal people with Greater Assam and with India as a whole?

NEFA offers a unique opportunity to every member of the Administration, for it is attempting an exciting and unusual experiment which, if successful, will write a significant page in the history of civilization's dealings with primitive people. Elsewhere in the world, colonists have often gone into tribal areas for what they can get; the Government of India has gone into NEFA for what it can give. Whenever a new project is considered or policy proposed, the one criticism is whether it will be for the benefit of the tribal people.

The keynote of the Administration's policy indeed is this: the tribesmen first, the tribesmen last, the tribesmen all the time.

During the last four years, astonishing progress has been made. The entire Administration has been reorganized, high standards of efficiency and integrity have been established, the many diver-



your interests and plans have been integrated. A tradition has already grown up, and more and more officers have had their imagination captured by what I have described as the Philosophy of NEFA.

The difficulties have been almost overwhelming and only a united, enthusiastic team sincerely devoted to a high ideal could have met them unafraid. Problems of movement and supply, lack of trained personnel, the difficult terrain, persistent if uninformed criticism from outside, the constant threat of political infection from the disturbed areas so near at hand, have made still more exacting a task which would have been formidable under the most favourable conditions.

There is no complacency in the NEFA Administration and its own officers are its severest critics. It has still a long way to go, both in practical achievement and in the full implementation of the scientific and humanitarian ideals which inspire it. But a start has been made and it is on the way.

The tribal people of India offer us a very special challenge. Their simplicity, which is most lovable; their art, which often gives them the dignity of princes but is so easily destroyed; their courtesy and hospitality, discipline and self-reliance; their ability to work hard and co-operatively; their occasional bewilderment before the advance of an unfamiliar world, and yet their welcome and friendliness to that world; these things win the heart and call for the very best in those who try to serve them. Nothing can be too good for them; but with what care that good has to be shared!



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